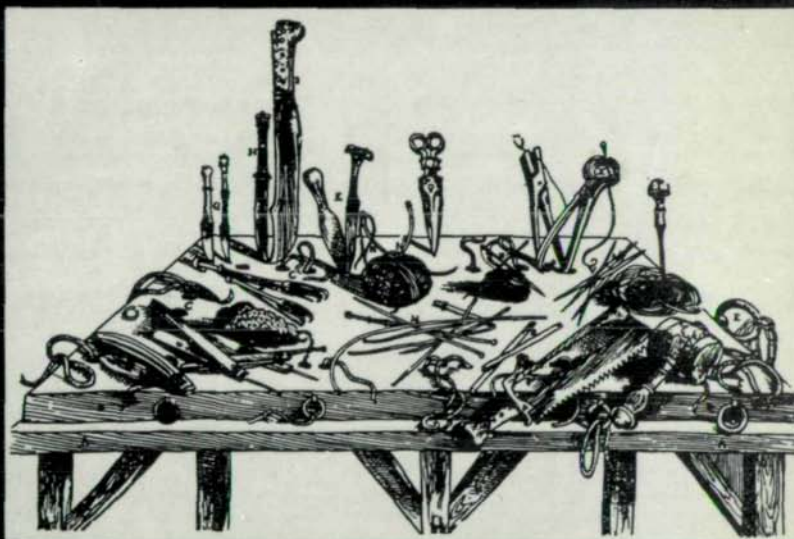


Screen



Phallic panic: male hysteria and *Dead Ringers*

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith on history and the cinema

The BFI: re-tooling the culture industry

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Cover illustration Anatomical dissecting instruments from a drawing by sixteenth century physician Andreas Vesalius

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Correction

An error appears in the first sentence of the final paragraph of Steve
Neale's article, 'Questions of genre' in the last issue of **Screen** (vol. 31,
no. 1, p. 66). The sentence should read:

By way of conclusion, I would like to stress the need for further
research, further concrete and specific analyses, and for much more
attention to be paid to genres hitherto neglected in genre studies: for
example, the adventure film, the war film and the epic.

Misplaced punctuation in the published version makes the war film and
the epic appear as sub-sets of the adventure film. Our apologies to the
author.

Phallic panic: male hysteria and *Dead Ringers*

BARBARA CREED

Women, you know, they wane by candle-light, they spoil, melt, twist, ooze! [. . .]. The end of tapers is a horrible sight, the end of ladies, too, . . .

Celine.¹

*I'm really saying that the inside of the body must have a completely different aesthetic. You take the most beautiful woman in the world, and you cut her open – is she as beautiful on the inside? Cronenberg.*²

Most early illustrations of the uterus, from Leonardo to Vesalius, depict it as the cornua or horned uterus, pointing to the supposed relationship between female sexuality and the devil.³ David Cronenberg's films, particularly *Dead Ringers* (1988), appear to be unusually obsessed, like many films in the horror genre, with the connection between woman, womb and the grotesque. This obsession suggests the workings of phallic panic, a form of male hysteria which, unlike female hysteria, appears to have emerged in response to male fears and anxieties about the womb as, paradoxically, a site of both abjection and envy.

On thinking about *Dead Ringers*, I return compulsively to the film's title. Who and/or what are the 'dead ringers'? The obvious answer is Elliot and Beverly Mantle, the twin gynaecologists, who in a double sense are 'dead ringers': not only are they completely

¹ Paul Celine quoted in Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 169.

² Anne Billson, 'Cronenberg on Cronenberg: a career in stereo', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 56, no. 660 (January 1989) pp. 3–6.

³ This association developed under Christianity. In 'pagan' times, horns were associated with fecundity as 'the horn of plenty'.

4 For further information see, Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

identical (the popular meaning of the term), but by the close of the narrative they are literally *dead* ringers. There is, however, another context in which the term becomes meaningful. Through the agency of her malformed reproductive system – her trifurcate or triple cervix – the body of the heroine, Claire Niveau, gives another and altogether different meaning to the term. Her three cervixes suggest a duplication grounded in sameness – three identical entrances to, exits from, that first home, the womb – three dead ringers. Her mutation is in a sense symmetrical and complements the ‘doubleness’ presented by the twin gynaecologists. My response to the film is haunted by the possibility of a trifurcate cervix, an image both uncanny and unknown, never represented visually in the film (not even in the credit sequence) but nevertheless ever-present because of the constant verbal and symbolic references to woman’s reproductive system as a signifier of the grotesque. It is also an image which is unrepresentable – except in fantasy. Bifurcate or double cervixes are not common, but at least they are known in medical circles; whereas trifurcates are unknown, impossible. Cronenberg has chosen to construct his heroine as a figure whose anatomy is grounded in myth. Her representation in the film makes sense only if she is seen as a maternal fantasy figure.

Many ancient cultures linked woman’s body to a concept of the figure three in its magical or sacred aspect.⁴ In neolithic sculptures and drawings, the triangle was used to represent the female genital area: eventually it came to signify ‘woman’, as in Egypt, where the hieroglyphic sign for ‘woman’ was a triangle. In the Greek religious alphabet, the delta or triangle represented the Holy Door, the vulva of Demeter, the mother goddess. (In a modern parody of this, male homosexuals in Nazi Germany were forced to wear an inverted pink triangle as a sign of their ‘feminine’ identity.) The female triangle, as a signifier of woman and her genital ‘holy place’, had its male counterpart in the ‘triple phallus’ attributed to any god whose purpose was to mate with the triple goddess. A well known symbol of the triple phallus was the trident. With the gradual decline of neolithic fertility religions and of the central role attributed to the female reproductive cycle, many of the symbolic meanings attached to the triple goddess were slowly altered and in most instances debased. The triple goddess invariably became a monstrous triad – the three Gorgons, the three Harpies, the triple Hecate, the three Sirens, the three witches in *Macbeth*. This decline and altered significance also affected representations of the male consort of the triple goddess, who was transformed into an underground god – Hades, Pluto, Neptune, the Christian devil. He was frequently called the ‘trident bearer’ and often carried a trident which represented his triple or three-pronged penis. The word ‘triangle’ continues to bear traces of its original meaning (woman/sexuality) in contemporary discourses such as psychoanalysis, where the term

'oedipal triangle' signifies a family constellation in which the mother figure is central.

With her triple cervix or triple-headed womb, Claire Niveau, the heroine of *Dead Ringers*, like the mythological triple goddess, is guardian of the entrance to the womb – once revered in myth and religion as a 'sacred place'. She is also another of Cronenberg's monstrous female freaks whose mutancy is defined specifically in relation to the female reproductive system. In *Rabid* (1977), the heroine grows a penis in her armpit; in *The Brood* (1979), her womb is attached to the outside of her body; in *The Fly* (1986), she dreams of giving birth to a giant maggot. Significantly, Cronenberg himself plays the gynaecologist in the latter nightmare scene. Like the triple goddess in her positive and negative forms, Claire Niveau's representation in *Dead Ringers* is highly ambivalent: she represents woman as both saviour and destroyer. Through her agency, as woman and mother, the twin brothers will learn either to recognize themselves as 'different', autonomous and individual and begin the painful process of separation; or they will regress, heeding only their desire for unity, lack of differentiation and death. The background against which this struggle is waged is the body of woman, the central signifier of difference and symbolic castration – her womb.

The mythical status of 'woman' and womb in *Dead Ringers* is clearly alluded to in the film's opening credits. The illustrations of the credit sequence are drawn from both science and mythology. They are all on the theme of dissection, the pregnant female body, birth and twins. The first is of a drawing by Andreas Vesalius,⁵ the famous sixteenth-century physician, noted for the scientific exactness and precision of his work. The illustration depicts an array of instruments then used in anatomical dissections: knives, scissors, clamps, saws, ropes. The next illustration is of a woman who stands with her arms spread out, her skin folded back from the uterus, revealing the inside of her body. A second image moves towards us: it shows two embryos, possibly Siamese twins, one folded around the other and apparently joined to the same placenta. Another image reveals a drawing of the inside of a pregnant female body, the outer layers of the womb peeled back to reveal the foetus nestled inside. Interestingly, this illustration also depicts the 'horned' uterus – two pointed horns rise from the junction of the uterus and the vagina.⁶ The final drawing is one of Ambroise Pare's famous illustrations⁷ on the theme of 'monsters and marvels': it is of two hermaphroditic twin children joined at the back. Each twin, one male and the other female, has both female and male genitals.

Through its display of medical illustrations, of both a mythical and a realistic kind, this sequence presents us with the dominant narrative movements and motifs of the text: the fetishization of medical instruments, dissection of the female body, twin embryos in the womb, separation of the twins, and a final image which suggests

5 J.B. de C.M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, *The Anatomical Drawings of Andreas Vesalius* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1982), pp. 128–9.

6 *Ibid.* pp. 236–7.

7 Ambroise Pare, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 29.

Hermaphroditic twin children
Ambroise Pare, 1510?-1590

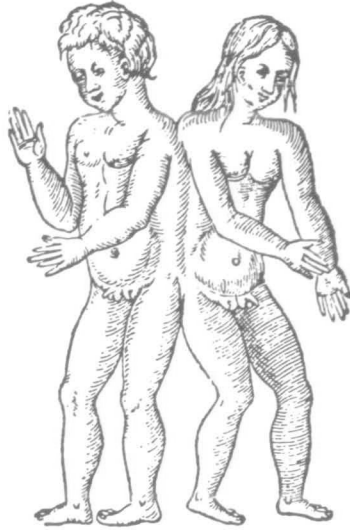


Figure of two hermaphroditic twin children, being joined back to back the one to the other

reunification in the form of an hermaphrodite. Forming a background to the unfolding of these events is the ever-present image of the womb, depicted at one point as the horned uterus. The fanciful nature of this latter image is played upon throughout the narrative in the frequent references to the heroine's marvellous/monstrous triple cervix. These images, accompanied by the symbolic appearance of the colour red, also point to the film's dominant themes: doubleness and the desire for unity, fear of separation, ambivalence to woman as a maternal figure, gynaecology and misogyny, narcissism and castration anxiety, male hysteria and desire for death.

A major problem confronting the spectator is that although, at one level, *Dead Ringers* appears to be presenting a devastating critique of the sado-masochistic potential inherent in the relationship between female patient and gynaecologist, at another level the film also plays to the sadistic desires of the spectator who might derive pleasure from watching pain inflicted on women's genital organs. Several scenes depicting gynaecological examination also play on specifically female fears relating to the vulnerability of her reproductive system at the hands of a sadistic gynaecological establishment. The fact that Cronenberg constructs his heroine as a masochistic woman, who derives pleasure from the twins' treatment of her, only serves to reinforce the sadistic appeal of these scenes.

Male hysteria

I have dwelt at some length on the mythological and historical basis of various images which are central to *Dead Ringers*, not only because the text itself draws on images and themes from past ages, but also because any discussion of castration and hysteria, which usually means *female* castration and *female* hysteria, eventually finds itself in the realm of myth and fantasy. *Dead Ringers* is interesting, however, because it explores these issues in relation to its male protagonists. The film provides us with a fascinating study of the representation of male hysteria as a defence against the possibility of *symbolic* castration, that is, the castrations or separations which occur in the infant's early history and which the infant experiences as a loss of something which it feels is an integral part of its own body – such as separation from the womb or loss of the mother's breast.

Freud always acknowledged that hysteria was not specific to women. He writes of 'the unsuspected frequency of cases of male hysteria',⁸ especially traumatic hysteria. He also claimed that the behaviour of male hysterics did not differ in any way from that of female hysterics; although, in a sexist aside, he states that male hysteria is of greater practical significance:

Hysteria in males gives the appearance of a severe illness; the symptoms it produces are as a rule obstinate; the illness in men, since it has the greater significance of being an occupational interruption, is of greater practical importance.⁹

Although Freud refused to define hysteria as an illness which affected only women, he nevertheless wrote primarily about female hysterics. As Phyllis Chesler has noted, 'Although the ethic and referent of mental health in our society is a masculine one, most psychoanalytic theoreticians have written primarily about women'.¹⁰ In one sense, the nature of hysteria is quite specific to woman in that, historically, its origin was associated with uterine problems. The earliest medical reference to hysteria was found on an Egyptian medical papyrus, dating from about 1900 BC. The Egyptians attributed hysteria to abnormal movements of the uterus, which it was believed could travel away from its proper position. The Greeks attributed a sexual explanation to the phenomenon of the wandering womb. The womb wandered around a woman's body if deprived of moisture. Plato argued that it was like an animal with an independent existence. These changes in position were linked with specific illnesses. According to Hippocrates:

If the organ came to rest in this position [near the hypochondrium] it would cause convulsions similar to those of epilepsy. If it mounted higher and attached itself to the heart, the

8 Sigmund Freud, 'Preface to the translation of Charcot's *Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System*' (1886), in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 11.

9 Sigmund Freud, 'Hysteria', *Standard Edition*, vol. 1, p. 52.

10 Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 75.

11 Vern L. Bullough, 'Medieval medical and scientific views of women', *Viator, Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, no. 4 (1973), pp. 485–501.

12 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 130.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

patient would feel anxiety and oppression and begin to vomit. If it fastened to her liver, the woman would lose her voice and grit her teeth and her complexion would turn ashen. If it lodged in the loins, she would feel a hard ball or lump in her side. If it mounted as high as her head, it would bring pain around her eyes and nose, make the head to feel heavy, and cause drowsiness and lethargy to set in.¹¹

The only way to keep the womb moist and prevent it from travelling was to keep woman's body moist; and the only way to achieve this was to activate woman's bodily fluids through constant sexual intercourse.

In her fascinating study of hysteria, Elaine Showalter explains the hysterical response of the ancients to female illness in this way:

A striking aspect of the seizure was *globus hystericus*, the sensation that a ball was rising in the oesophagus, producing a feeling of choking or suffocation. Indeed the ancients had believed that this feeling was caused by the rising of the womb itself within the body.¹²

According to Showalter, hysteria was seen as a female illness because its symptoms were of such a highly emotional nature: 'fits, fainting, vomiting, choking, sobbing, laughing, paralysis'.¹³ She quotes an authority of the day who described hysteria as "the nosological limbo of all unnamed female maladies" and protests that it might just as well be called "mysteria".¹⁴ For centuries hysteria was viewed as the definitive female illness, primarily because of the capricious, changeable nature of its symptom and the connections between the hysterical symptom and the vagaries of women's mysterious reproductive system.

Showalter argues that the period from 1870 to World War I became known as the 'golden age' of hysteria because of the dramatic rise in the number of cases reported, and because of the central place it came to assume in medical discourses of the period. However, after the end of the war the term underwent a radical reevaluation, primarily because, for the first time, large numbers of men were afflicted with the illness. Their symptoms included: paralysis, mutism, blindness and a range of neurasthenic symptoms such as nightmares, depression and disorientation. These men were casualties of the war: their symptoms were described as 'shell shock'. Initially, psychiatrists sought explanations for the symptoms of 'shell shock' in a variety of unlikely causes: food poisoning, hereditary weaknesses, noise, lack of discipline, cowardice. Eventually, the medical establishment agreed that the real cause of male hysteria was the profound emotional upset brought about by the intolerable conditions of war. Showalter argues that the inability of men to live up to the high ideals of the masculine role was a

major cause of male hysteria. Like women, men were forced to express their distress and internal conflicts through the body. Interestingly, Showalter notes evidence of hostility and envy displayed towards women because they were permitted, even encouraged, to express their internal conflicts. In *Parade's End* (1925) Ford Madox Ford asks resentfully: ‘“Why isn’t one a beastly girl and privileged to shriek?”’¹⁵

Freud also related the causes of hysteria in men to a failure to take up the ‘proper’ masculine role. This is made clear in his discussion of the libido and in his accounts of hysteria in men. ‘Where I have found hysteria in men, I have been able to prove the presence of abundant sexual passivity in their anamneses.’¹⁶ Using the female reproductive system as the norm, he draws parallels between the symptoms of hysteria in women and in men: ‘Finally, the left spermatic cord is very sensitive to pain, and this zone is continued along the course of the spermatic cord into the abdominal cavity to the area which in women is so often the site of “ovarialgia”’.¹⁷

Freud opposed the belief that there is a separate feminine and masculine libido. He maintained that there is only one libido, which serves both the masculine and the feminine sexual functions.¹⁸ This view provides a useful basis for a discussion of the unstable nature of gender and the impossibility, for both female and male subjects, of ever achieving a stable gender identity. There is however one major complication: the libido is ‘masculine’. Although Freud modified his earlier view that the libido was male in its essence, he nevertheless continued to privilege the libido as somehow naturally ‘virile’:

If, following the conventional equation of activity and masculinity, we are inclined to describe it as masculine, we must not forget that it also covers trends with a passive aim. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition ‘feminine libido’ is without any justification. Furthermore, it is our impression that more constraint has been applied to the libido when it is pressed into the service of the feminine function, and that – to speak teleologically – Nature takes less careful account of its [that function’s] demands than in the case of masculinity.¹⁹

Freud does not adequately explain why the libido in its masculine function should be subject to lesser repression than when in the service of the feminine function. Given the impossibility of the individual male ever living up to the promise of the phallus²⁰ as it is promulgated within the discourse of mastery within patriarchal culture, it is not surprising that men, too, suffer from hysteria: this, for obvious reasons, is unacceptable and so becomes disguised in various ways – ‘shell shock’ being a telling example. Freud’s reference to a teleological function points to an underlying

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 173.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, ‘Extracts from the Fliess papers’, *Standard Edition*, vol. 1, p. 228.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, ‘Observation of a severe case of hemi-anaesthesia in a hysterical male’ (1886), *Standard Edition*, vol. 1, p. 31.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Femininity’, *Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 2, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 165.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 166.

²⁰ For an interesting discussion of this problem see Richard Dyer, ‘Don’t look now: the male pin-up’, *Screen*, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (1982), pp. 61–73.

essentialism in his theory, despite his attempts to avoid this through his theorization of a single libido. Nevertheless, Freud's theory of the libido opened the way to an understanding of the causes of hysteria in men as well as in women.

Showalter argues that a typical response of the male hysteric was displacement:

Men's quarrels with the feminine element in their own psyches became externalized as quarrels with women, and hysteria expressed itself in part as fear or anger towards the neurotic woman, an anger we see in the war poetry of Owen and Sassoon, in the novels of Aldington and Ford, and in texts such as T.S. Eliot's prose-poem 'Hysteria' (1917), where male anxiety is projected onto the devouring female.²¹

²¹ Showalter, p. 173.

Freud, of course, discussed this anxiety in relation to male fears of castration. In his paper on *Fetishism*, he writes that probably 'no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital'.²² In *Medusa's Head*, he refers to 'woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated'. The male spectator's response follows the classic path of the hysteric. Under extreme pressure from psychical demands, his body becomes a site for the inscription of its signs. His organ is struck dumb, paralyzed. Using a metaphor from classical mythology, Freud describes the course of the male hysteric's response. 'The sight of the Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone'.²³ Paralysis is one of the key symptoms that Freud and Breuer outlined in their discussion of the symptoms which afflict the hysteric's body. The body of the hysteric is transformed into a text whose signs provide clues to the origin of the illness. According to Freud, a contorted face can be read as a physical expression of the colloquialism 'a slap in the face'. Similarly, I would argue that a paralysed penis is 'a dumb cluck/cock', too terrified to crow as a cock should.²⁴ So strong is male castration anxiety that warriors use images of the Medusa's head to terrify their enemies: 'We read in Rabelais of how the Devil took to flight when the woman showed him her vulva'.²⁵ Such an extreme response is based on a mistaken perception of the female genitalia, a disturbance in the field of vision which, according to Freud, is another symptom of hysteria. The male subject, I would argue, fails to see something which was never there in the first place. His body is doubly marked by hysterical symptoms; one of which affects his sight, the other his genitals. Freud of course linked the eye and the male genitals: for men, going blind is a sign of Oedipal desire for the mother, the 'mother of the imaginary', the phallic mother, a fetish figure designed to ward off castration anxiety. Thus, signs of male hysteria, invoked by the sight of the female genitals, are manifested as genital

²² Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', *Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 7, p. 354.

²³ Sigmund Freud, 'Medusa's head', *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, pp. 273–4.

²⁴ The word 'cock' was originally used as a name for certain fowl – and still is. 'Cock' is used in certain sayings to suggest different states of phallic prowess such as 'at half-cock' and 'cock-of-the-walk'. A 'cluck' is a bird's cry – a 'dumb cluck/cock' is a stupid person. A 'dumb glutton' refers to the vagina.

²⁵ Freud, 'Medusa's head', p. 106.

paralysis and a disturbance of vision such as misrecognition or blindness.

In *Dead Ringers*, male hysteria is certainly invoked by castration anxiety: it is also present in the narcissism of the male characters who seek continuously to duplicate themselves – their actions, appearances, beliefs – in the figure of the other (twin). For doubleness itself can signify castration anxiety. According to Freud, the Medusa's head, with its writhing snakes, also reassures the male spectator. The snakes 'serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror'.²⁶ Thus, the repetition of imagery or objects which function as penis substitutes helps to allay anxiety. The male subject's narcissistic investment in representations of himself points to an important connection between castration anxiety and the process of duplication. *Dead Ringers* explores this relationship through its central characters – twin male gynaecologists, men whose success in the field of fertility depends upon their ability to uncover and control the mysteries of the womb. Their success in the latter area depends in turn upon their ability to bolster or shore up their own threatened sense of identity, threatened by the display of female genitalia, through the reassuring display of their own self-image in the ever-present identical image of the other.

The representation of male hysteria in Hollywood cinema has taken various forms and differs from genre to genre. In the woman's film (*Random Harvest* [1942]) and the suspense thriller (*Spellbound* [1945]), male hysteria is represented in terms of a mental problem such as a loss of memory. Female hysteria in these genres is constructed more in relation to the body and displayed as a physical symptom such as a brain tumour (*Dark Victory* [1939]), a loss of speech (*The Spiral Staircase* [1946]), or a facial disfigurement (*A Woman's Face* [1941]). A more recent film, *Paris, Texas* (1984), explores male hysteria in relation to amnesia and sexual desire. The representation of male hysteria as arising from a disturbance of gender occurs most frequently in comedy: hysteria is displayed not only in sequences of crossdressing but also in the breakneck speed of these films – as, for instance, in *Some Like It Hot* (1959), the films of Jerry Lewis, and the sex comedies of Howard Hawks. Not only are these films about male hysteria, the texts themselves also become 'hysterical', probably because of the disruptive nature of their subject-matter. Recently, cinema has attempted to deal with a different form of male hysteria, one which is displaced onto a male body through which masculinity is represented as in excess, over-present. The films of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone display the male body as a living phallus: hysterical images of masculinity such as these point to the impossible nature of the phallic ideal, made even more so by the demands of the patriarchal cult of masculinity. In science fiction, male hysteria has found

²⁶ Ibid, p. 105.

²⁷ For an excellent discussion of the bachelor machine (e.g. time machines, birth machines) see Constance Penley, 'Feminism, film theory and the bachelor machines', *m/f*, no. 10, (1985), pp. 35–59.

²⁸ See Paul Radin, *Hero Cycles of the Winnebago*, quoted in Carl Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (London: Picador, 1978), chapter 2. The twins of this cycle always represent two sides of human nature and through their combined powers they win all honours. In all versions, the twins fall victim to their egos and are punished: they are reunited in death. *Dead Ringers* follows this narrative pattern very closely. In recent films the theme of twins has become very popular: *Big Business* (1988), *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1988), *Twins* (1988), and now *Dead Ringers*.

²⁹ The woman's film of the 1940s frequently dealt with the theme of identical female twins. See Mary Ann Doane's fascinating study of the woman's film, *The Desire To Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987). *Dead Ringers* makes an interesting comparison with these texts, in that the Mantle twins are to some extent 'feminised' by being placed within narrative structures normally assigned to female protagonists.

expression in the theme of *couvade*: in these texts (*Frankenstein* [1931], *Altered States* [1980], *The Fly* [1986]), the 'mad' male scientist attempts to take up the position of woman by creating life in a 'womb' of his own. The *mise-en-scène* of the laboratory²⁷ in these films has become increasingly fanciful: in *The Fly* the scientist creates two large womb-like 'teleporters' in which he deconstructs and reconstructs himself.

A prevalent representation of male hysteria, and one which runs through various genres – particularly film noir – occurs most commonly when the male hysteric displaces his fear of castration, his anxiety about masculinity, onto woman's body, specifically her genitals. Woman's body becomes the text in which we read signs of man's hysteria. In the slasher subgenre (*Dressed to Kill* [1980], *Suspiria* [1977]) of the horror film, the male psychopath transforms woman's entire body into a bleeding wound in order to stave off his own castration anxieties. We can also see the processes of displacement at work in film noir – in the fetishization of the heroine's anklet in *Double Indemnity* (1944), of her hair in *Gilda* (1946), and of her genitals in *Blue Velvet* (1986). What is particularly interesting about *Dead Ringers* is the way in which it constructs male hysteria in relation to the uterus, to castration anxieties, and to male narcissism.

Dead ringers

The representation of male hysteria in *Dead Ringers* is related to the impossible nature of the masculine quest for wholeness and totality. The central narrative movement of *Dead Ringers* is expression of the conflicting desire for the twins' own symbiotic union on the one hand, and for their separation on the other. Like the famous twins of mythology,²⁸ Beverly and Elliot Mantle also eventually pay with their lives for attempting to play god. Known by their associates as 'the fabulous Mantle twins', they excel in their field. They also complement each other in every respect. Beverly is introverted and reserved, Elliot extroverted, urbane and arrogant. Beverly carries out the research, Elliot gives public lectures and promotes their work. Beverly is sexually shy, Elliot a playboy. Yet despite these apparent differences, they are able to exchange roles. When their tragedy reaches its final conclusion, Beverly takes control, while Elliot take Beverly's place as the victim. They even share the same women. Elliot passes his unsuspecting dates onto his 'baby brother', saying, 'If we didn't share women, you'd still be a virgin'. 'Don't worry' he says to Beverly, 'just do me!' In contrast with other texts (*Dead Ringer* [1964], *A Stolen Life* [1938], *Dark Mirror* [1946]) about identical female twins,²⁹ *Dead Ringers* emphasizes the narcissistic relationship of the pair, rather than constructing them as

complete opposites representing different moral positions – one good, the other evil/emotionally disturbed. At one point, Elliot says of Beverly: ‘Whatever’s in his bloodstream goes directly into mine’.

The Mantle twins live and work together in complete harmony – their union seems almost mystical – until the day when Claire Niveau enters their consulting rooms. On examining her, Beverly discovers a triple cervix – the cause of her infertility. Pretending to be Beverly, Elliot also examines Claire. ‘That’s fantastic!’ he says, and then proceeds to discuss the notion of ‘inner beauty’. He suggests the possibility of holding beauty contests for the insides of bodies – to find the best liver, or best spleen. Later, over dinner, Claire asks Elliot to explain the nature of her uterus. He replies: ‘It has three doorways, three cervixes, leading into three separate compartments in your uterus. That is fabulously rare’.

Having entertained himself with Claire, Elliot encourages Beverly to take his place without her knowledge, to try her out – or else he will do terrible things to her. ‘What sort of terrible things?’ asks Beverly, suddenly attracted to the idea. In the following scene, Beverly ties Claire to the bed with surgical tubing and clamps. The room is bathed in a bluish light, sounds of deep breathing fill the room: it is as if a birth were taking place. Claire is obviously aroused by satisfaction of her masochistic needs: on two previous occasions she has referred to her desire to be punished and her need for humiliation. Afterwards she exclaims in a mocking tone, ‘Oh Doc, I am cured!’ The scene draws bizarre connections between gynaecological practice and sexual desire, clearly indicating that the twins are perversely aroused by the insides of women’s bodies and the paraphernalia associated with surgery. For the first time, Beverly falls in love; he even refuses to share the details of his relationship with Elliot. Prior to this, the twins have shared their women, each one sleeping with the same woman in turn and then exchanging the ‘juicy details’ as if consulting about a patient. The women never know they have been making love to two different men. But now Beverly refuses to tell Elliot anything. ‘I want to keep it for myself!’, he says adamantly.

The one figure capable of shattering the complacency of the twins’ self-contained world is woman in her maternal aspect. In a sense, Claire Niveau complements the twins – who are also, by definition, genetically deviant. Yet her deviance outshines even that of the twins: she is, in Elliot’s words, ‘fabulously rare.’ Her symmetrical deviance makes her an object of desire to the twins, particularly Beverly. When Elliot first describes the nature of her triple cervix, Claire replies: ‘Could I have triplets . . . one in each compartment?’ Her womb with its three compartments offers the impossible – a womb for each of the twins and a third womb for the ‘other’. Who is ‘the other’ – the third dead ringer – who might dwell in one of her triple compartments?

Dead Ringers

(Courtesy of CBS/Fox Video and
the B.F.I. stills archive)



The poster used in advertising *Dead Ringers* suggests that Claire is the third figure. Her face is interposed between the faces of the twins. The three faces look alike: almost as if the central characters were triplets – two male, one female. Claire's eyes are highlighted and 'see' for all three – the twins' eyes are not drawn at all. Her other features are faint, giving the impression that she is the one who 'sees' or knows. This impression is confirmed in the scene where Claire confronts Beverly about his unnatural relationship with Elliot. Yet despite the similarities between the three protagonists, Claire is ultimately represented as an outsider. She signifies woman-as-difference, woman as castrated other. The third figure of *Dead Ringers* is not woman but the 'other' that the twins become when they are together – the twins as a single unity, represented symbolically by the idea of Siamese twins: when the twins slide further into their nightmare world of drugs and self destruction, their conscious identification with the Siamese twins, Chang and Eng, intensifies.

The twins' fear of separation is represented most vividly in Beverly's nightmare. When Claire discovers that she has been duped by the twins, that they have both been sleeping with her, she confronts them with the pathological nature of their relationship. In despair, Beverly begins to take drugs; his work suffers. Claire and Beverly later meet by accident and resume their relationship. That night Beverly awakens from a shocking nightmare in which he imagines that he and Elliot are Siamese twins joined at the stomach. Claire is saying: 'I'll just separate you'. Puzzled, Beverly replies: 'Separate us?' Claire lowers her head and begins to gnaw through the skin: suddenly she pulls back, drawing with her a long phallic piece of flesh – the core of flesh that binds them. Beverly wakes up screaming 'Don't let me dream that again!' and folds himself into a

³⁰ For a discussion of the primal fantasies see Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the origins of sexuality', in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 5–34.

foetal position, huddled against her body. His terror is a response to the abject nature of his nightmare in which he imagines the birth scene, or primal scene, as one overlaid with the terror of castration.³⁰ Here castration is represented not as a fantasy about the origin of sexual difference, but rather as a fantasy about the origin of subjectivity. Separation and difference are the price one pays for subjectivity. This scene mirrors a grotesque birth scene from another Cronenberg film, *The Brood*. Here, the mother has given birth to a brood of deformed dwarf children, each one of whom represents her suppressed anger. Her husband watches in horror as she tears the skin of the birth sac attached to the outside of her body, and bites through the umbilical chord with her teeth. As in *Dead Ringers*, the woman in *The Brood* uses her teeth to divide, to separate. She is the monstrous mother of symbolic castration. It is in relation to her body that the crucial separations of infancy and childhood take place.

Symbolic castration

The notion of symbolic castration is quite separate from the theory of woman's supposed castration as developed by Freud: symbolic castration refers to other losses and separations experienced by the child in its early years. These include separation from the mother's body in birth, loss of the breast, loss of faeces. Although Freud himself argued that the 'act of birth is the prototype of all castration', he nevertheless refused to incorporate this notion of castration in his own theory of the castration complex:

It has been argued that every time his mother's breast is withdrawn from a baby he is bound to feel it as a castration (that is to say, as the loss of what he regards as an important part of his own body); that, further, he cannot fail to be similarly affected by the regular loss of his faeces; and finally, that the act of birth itself (consisting as it does in the separation of the child from his mother, with whom he had hitherto been united) is the prototype of all castration. While recognizing all of these roots of the complex, I have nevertheless put forward the view that the term 'castration complex' ought to be confined to those excitations and consequences which are bound up with the loss of the *penis*.³¹

In his theory of the formation of subjectivity, Lacan paid specific attention to the notion of symbolic castration. He argued that the subject is marked by castration and lack from birth and that the subject actually comes into being by confronting the question of lack. In his theory, 'object *a*' represents the 'lacking object':

It is the object which unchains desire, especially desire for what is

³¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy', *Standard Edition*, vol. 10, p. 8.

³² Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (London: Free Association Books, 1986), p. 176.

³³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 72.

³⁴ Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 160.

lacking with regard to the mother, and what the mother desires. The 'object *a*' may be an orifice, a piece of breast, the anus, etc. It represents what the Other lacks in order to be absolute, represents the lack itself as the irreducible remainder in any signification.³²

In particular, Lacan isolated the mirror stage as crucial to the constitution of the subject's sense of self in relation to lack. Again the role of the mother is crucial here. It is the mother who grants the child an image of itself – but this image exists only in a moment of recognition and misrecognition.

Kristeva also argues for the central importance of a symbolic castration which precedes the castration complex and which is also constructed in relation to the mother. In *Powers of Horror*, she asserts that the child's first understandings of difference occur during the period of the pre-Oedipal or the 'semiotic' when the child learns to relate to the mother as maternal authority, the figure who teaches it about its body through bodily movements, songs and other forms of symbolic communication.³³ Later, the child again experiences symbolic castration through the agency of the mother. In contrast to Lacan's view, Kristeva argues that it is not so much the look of the mother that grants the child an image of itself, thus helping to constitute its narcissism and sense of identity; rather it is the mother's 'looking away' which is crucial. According to Mary Jacobus, the child chooses narcissism as a kind of defence against the mother's preoccupation with the other (her work, the father):

By a kind of collusion, the child chooses narcissism as a defense against, and as a way of maintaining, the necessary space of 'vide' which will enable it to enter into the realm of images (Lacan's 'imaginary') and ultimately into the symbolic realm.³⁴

Psychoanalytic theory thus provides us with a narrative about the way in which the subject is constituted through loss and separation: separation from the mother at birth, loss of the breast, the experience of division in the semiotic, misrecognition of the self in the mirror phase, the division of the subject in language.

The most important article on the subject of symbolic castration as it relates to the cinema is Kaja Silverman's 'Lost objects and mistaken subjects'. Silverman's aim is to explore the relationship, as it has been theorized in specific texts, between these two notions of castration – symbolic and anatomical. Her central argument is that classical cinema tends to convert male anxieties about symbolic castration into anxieties about so-called female castration, so that the image of woman comes to bear the sole burden of the male subject's inability to deal with symbolic castration, precondition of

his own subjecthood. Silverman criticizes the 'anatomical literalness' of the Freudian theory of castration and the lengths to which Freud went in order to attach fetishism to a female anatomical lack:

I would like to suggest that this refusal to identify castration with any of the divisions which occur prior to the registration of sexual difference reveals Freud's desire to place a maximum distance between the male subject and the notion of lack. To admit that the loss of the object is also a castration would be to acknowledge that the male subject is already structured by absence prior to the moment at which he registers women's anatomical difference – to concede that he, like the female subject, has already been deprived of being, and already been marked by the language and desires of the Other.³⁵

The female subject is made to bear the burden of the castration (in the form of a wound) by which both female and male enter the symbolic order so that the male subject may maintain an illusion of his own completeness and superiority. The importance of this critique for feminist theory is that it enables us to see that the 'equation of woman with lack' is actually a '*secondary construction*, one which covers over *earlier sacrifices*';³⁶ that is, the sacrifices by which the infant experiences symbolic castration. Thus, according to Silverman, woman functions in relation to notions of castration in two quite different ways: she not only represents the various losses or symbolic castrations which precede the child's discovery of sexual difference, she also represents the losses through which a knowledge of sexual difference is established. In this way, classical cinema provides an important mechanism by and through which the male spectator can cover 'what is unspeakable within male subjectivity':³⁷

Through its endless renarrativization of the castration crisis, it transfers to the female subject the losses which afflict the male subject. It also arms him against the possible return of these losses by orchestrating a range of defensive operations to be used against the image of woman, from disavowal and fetishism to voyeurism and sadism. In this way the trauma which would otherwise capsize the male viewer is both elicited and contained.³⁸

What is crucial about this process of transferral is the part played by woman's body. In her discussion Silverman stresses the notion of lack as that which holds the most terror for the male subject. I would also include the mother's body as an object of terror from which the male subject wishes to separate himself. It is her body which serves as a constant reminder of the anguish associated with separation; consequently, it is *in* her body that he displaces his fear of castration. The representation of woman's body in certain genres

³⁵ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 15.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 14. Italics in original.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 31.

(melodrama, film noir, horror) as a *body-in-excess* has always pointed indirectly to male fears of female sexuality, particularly in its aggressive, incorporating aspect. It is the body of the mother, the maternal figure, that most clearly represents the body of separations, the body which reawakens in the male subject his unconscious anxieties about separation. But the mother's body also represents simultaneously a desire for reunification, a reassurance that total symbiosis and unity are possible. In *Dead Ringers*, Claire Niveau's body with its triple cervix is the quintessential maternal *body-in-excess*, a factor which emphasizes the symbolic function of her body in the narrative. Yet, ironically, she is also infertile.

In her work on the maternal body, Kristeva raises the problem for psychoanalytic theory of how this body is to be defined. On the one hand, the mother, through her body, guarantees the continuation of the species; the mother is on the side of nature. Yet on the other hand, the maternal body is also the site of separations in relation to which subjectivity is instituted. Thus the mother is also on the side of the symbolic. Kristeva describes the maternal body as a '“filter”': a passage, the threshold on which nature and culture confront one another. To imagine someone as that filter is the kernel from which religious mystifications develop, the soil of their breeding ground is the fantasy of the phallic mother'. The danger is that the mother will be constructed as the Eternal Feminine, 'Mother-Master, the domatrix of psychosis'.³⁹ Claire Niveau as a maternal fantasy figure represents both extremes of this axis for Beverly. In the end, he retreats totally from her. Finally, he and Elliot attempt to recreate the possibility of eternal union within themselves.

In contrast to the conventional notion of woman as castrated other, *Dead Ringers* demonstrates that there is a division and lack, a form of symbolic castration, that precedes the castration which Freud located only in woman's body. This is seen most clearly in Beverly's nightmare about separation and in the narcissistic dyad created by the twins. It is the image of woman's womb which is used to confront the male subject with his own lack, his own castration or separation from the mother's body on which, ultimately, is based the constitution of his identity. It is the threat of symbolic castration (separation from his twin, separation from the womb) which ultimately brings to a crisis the nightmare which has haunted the twins from the very beginning. Unable to deal with this threat, Beverly displaces his fear of separation onto the body of woman – it is woman's body (not his own) which he imagines is literally castrated, mutant, monstrous.

This notion of woman as a mutant creature, evidenced in the supposedly deformed nature of her womb and genitalia, most clearly anchors the concept of castration in the female body. However, not until Beverly projects his own fears onto Claire are we encouraged to see woman as deviant. He tells the man he wrongly believes is

³⁹ Julia Kristeva, 'The maternal body', *m/f*, nos. 5-6 (1981), pp. 158-63.

40 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

her lover that he has been ‘fucking a mutant’. Furthermore, when Beverly turns on the woman, he extends the notion of freakishness to her entire reproductive system. The imaginary triple cervix, once a source of comfort and reassurance, becomes an object of fear and loathing. In his book *On Monsters and Marvels*, Ambrose Pare demonstrates that there is a very fine line dividing the monstrous from the marvellous. As Juliet Mitchell points out, Freud also makes a similar point in his discussion of fetishism: the ‘fetish is treated with affection and hostility, [because] it represents the *absence* of the phallus and in itself, by its very existence, asserts the *presence* of it’.⁴⁰

As Beverly’s fear of separation/symbolic castration increases, he displaces his fears onto women, who are made to bear the burden of his delusions. At one point, he imagines that all of his female patients are mutant creatures, internally deformed. His erratic behaviour, physical withdrawal and extreme emotionality rapidly degenerate to more serious signs of emotional disturbance: uterine fantasies, misrecognitions, fear of the opposite sex, narcissistic withdrawal and desire for obliteration and death. Beverly’s hysterical response to woman-as-difference, and to the possibility of separation, gives rise to a train of events which lead to his, and Elliot’s, self-destruction. At the height of his madness, he commissions a set of grotesquely primitive instruments for operating on mutant women. Set out on a trolley in the operating theatre, they invoke a nightmare scenario – clawlike clamps, grotesque scalpels and speculums. In attempting to justify his use of these, he says to Elliot: ‘There’s nothing wrong with the instrument. It’s the body. The woman’s body was all wrong’. The horrifying instruments he has designed suggest symbolically a means of opening up, tearing apart, that first home which for him has now assumed all manner of horrors associated with the uncanny.

According to Freud, representations of castration can also work to protect the spectator against castration anxiety. In his article on castration, he argued that the serpents which surrounded the Medusa’s head also served to lessen the effect of horror:

It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of horror.⁴¹

41 ‘Medusa’s head’, p. 273.

This theory helps to explain the fetishization of the twins’ gynaecological instruments. At medical school they gained fame for their invention of the Mantle Retractor. When one patient complains to Beverly, who is under the influence of drugs, that the Retractor is hurting her, he is furious. He tells her that this is impossible because it is made of ‘solid gold’. Towards the end of the film, when he has withdrawn totally into drugs, Beverly finds

comfort by caressing the Retractor. The instrument functions as a fetish object, offering the twins a solid reassurance of their own phallic power which, as male gynaecologists, they clearly need when confronted continually with the threatening sight of female genitalia. Their other instruments – particularly Beverly's set designed for mutant women – function in the same way. The notion of castration anxiety also helps to explain the twins' puzzling predilection for red surgical gowns, masks, and gloves. By wearing red clothing, traces of woman's blood – the sight of which might awaken castration anxiety – are rendered invisible to their eyes.

One of the most marked changes in the horror film in recent years has been a growing preoccupation with the inside of the body, evident particularly in scenes which depict the inside coming to the outside as if the body were being turned inside out.⁴² At one point, Elliot jokes about the possibility of beauty contests for internal parts of the body. In discussion *Dead Ringers*, Cronenberg also stated that he was interested in the inside of the body: 'We've not designed an aesthetic for the inside of the body any more than we have developed an aesthetic of disease. Most people are disgusted – like when they watch an insect transform itself. But if you develop an aesthetic for it, it ceases to be ugly.'⁴³ In reality, however, the film's concern is with only one part of the inner body – woman's womb and reproductive system presented in a context of horror. It is difficult to see how *Dead Ringers* aestheticizes the insides of the body – unless of course Cronenberg is talking about an aesthetics of the monstrous as related only to woman.⁴⁴ Scenes of brutal gynaecological examinations, red-gowned doctors, references to women having sex with dogs, a trifurcate cervix, images of bizarre gynaecological instruments – all of these, while pointing to the growing insanity of the Mantle twins, also serve to associate woman and her reproductive system with the grotesque. Through association and direct explication, the image of woman's womb in *Dead Ringers* signifies mutancy. In marked contrast to this, the final images of the Mantle twins suggest the opposite – their demise is marked by a sense of classical beauty, dignity, tragic destiny. They lie in the shadow of death, their limbs elegantly draped with white sheets, their bodies entwined one with the other. The image of their beauty, however, is dependent upon the contrasting representation of woman and her body as grotesque.

The hermaphroditic fantasy

The injury to a body that wants itself whole is repaired through abolition of the other.

Francette Pacteau⁴⁵

⁴² For a discussion of inside/outside as a sign of abjection see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

⁴³ Alan Stanbrook, 'Cronenberg's creative cancers', *Sight & Sound*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Winter 1988/89), pp. 54–6.

⁴⁴ For an excellent discussion of this area see Mary Russo, 'Female grotesques: carnival and theory', in Teresa de Lauretis (ed.), *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 213–27.

⁴⁵ Francette Pacteau, 'The impossible referent: representation of the androgyne', in *Formations of Fantasy*, pp. 69–70.

Beverly and Elliot retreat into a world of drugs and oblivion. Interestingly, Elliot does not withdraw from Beverly; instead he takes on Beverly's problems as if they were his own. Failing to cure him of his drug dependency, Elliot joins him. The twins descend into a twilight world of drug abuse, infantilism and insanity. They walk around their apartment, now strewn with piles of rubbish, eating cake and drinking orange pop. When Elly demands ice cream, Beverly replies: 'We haven't got any ice cream. Mummy forgot to buy it'.

In a discussion of *Dead Ringers*, Cronenberg stated that he did not show the parents of the twins because he was trying to suggest that, as in a classical Greek tragedy, their lives are pre-determined'.⁴⁶ Certainly Cronenberg gives a sense of classical drama to his narrative, particularly in the haunting, elegaic music which has played throughout the narrative and is clearly heard in the film's final scene. If the twins' lives are predetermined, however, it is in relation to the mother figure whom Cronenberg has deliberately attempted to remove from the narrative. She is nevertheless there in the opening credit sequence, which displays the dissected bodies of several pregnant mothers; she is also present in the figure of Claire Niveau, who functions as the symbolic mother of separation; and finally she is there in relation to the twins' life-work, their life-blood. The womb and its mysteries point continually to the shadowy presence of the mother. It is against this background that the twins' destiny unfolds. Their tragic search for origins leads them always back to the womb and the mystery of creation, held within the body of woman.

Earlier, Elliot has remarked to Beverly: 'You haven't had any experience till I have it, too.' True to his words, Elliot takes on Beverly's pain and suffering. As the brothers embark on their frenzied journey of self-destruction, they become more and more difficult to distinguish. Pale, wasted, and sealed in the security of their womb-like apartment, they languish, as if waiting for death. In the final scene, Beverly uses the instruments designed especially for mutant women on Elly. Earlier when Elliot has begged Beverly not to destroy them both, Beverly has replied: 'But I'm only doing it to me, Elly. Don't you have a will of your own?' Elliot responds by recounting a story about the original Siamese twins: 'Do you remember the original Siamese twins, Chang and Eng? They were joined at the chest. Chang died of a stroke in the middle of the night. He was always the sickly one. When Eng woke up and found his brother was dead he died of fright right there in the bed. Does that answer your question?' Elly replies: 'The truth is no-one can tell us apart. We are both perceived as the one person'.

In the final scene, Beverly attempts to sever the non-existent cord that binds them. In Beverly's last meeting with Claire, when she asks him the purpose of the instruments, he replies: 'For separating

46 Stanbrook, 'Cronenberg's creative cancers', p. 56.

Siamese twins.' Mutant women and Siamese twins have become, in Beverly's deranged imagination, one and the same – or at least their reproductive organs are similar. The scene of separation also suggests a parody of a gynaecological operation. The twins take up positions in terms of sexual difference – Beverly is the gynaecologist, Elly his patient. Lying on the examination bench, his legs outstretched as if in stirrups, his stomach and genital area cut open and covered in blood, Elly is positioned as Beverly's 'female' patient. His position echoes that of Claire in the scene where we first see her – she too is lying on the examination bench, her legs apart. Beverly cuts open Elliot's stomach: he thus marks Elly as the feminine, symbolically carving out the place of the womb. Beverly lies across Elliot's body, their limbs intertwined beneath draped sheets, giving the impression of a tableau or classical sculpture. The symbolic significance of their name, 'Mantle', meaning a cover or cloak, becomes clear in this scene: the draped covering both points to, yet also hides, the wound by which they have always been symbolically – and are now literally – joined. The final image suggests a painting by Mantegna or Michelangelo's famous *Pieta*. The allusion to a classical tableau also gives the impression that, like many other famous twins, their destiny is inescapable. This final image of *Dead Ringers* points to various themes which have been central to the narrative.

First, it is telling that Cronenberg chose to conclude his sequence of images that accompanied the credits with Ambroise Pare's portrait of twin hermaphrodites joined back to back. Representations of the hermaphrodite usually show a figure with breasts and a penis, perceived either as a man with breasts or as a woman with a penis. In Ambroise Pare's illustration, and in the entwined bodies of the dead Mantle twins, we have a double representation – twin hermaphrodites. Pare's twins each have both sets of genitals, Cronenberg's represent each sex separately, their 'difference' symbolically marked. Elliot/Elly and Beverly/Bev become one. In disavowing sexual difference, both sexes are reunited with their other half: the androgyne is a totally self-sufficient figure, its narcissistic desire for complete sexual autonomy fulfilled. Thus the androgyne represents a fantasy about the abolition of sexual difference – a fantasy at the heart of the Mantle twins' ill-fated existence. In *Dead Ringers*, however, this fantasy is very much a man-made one. By taking up a masculine and a feminine place in relation to each other, the twins try to make up that loss which lies at the heart of sexual difference. As Francette Pacteau points out in her article on the androgyne, 'to be assigned one or the other sex entails a loss: that of the sexual position the subject has to surrender'. She refers to Freud's case study of Little Hans, the boy who wanted to have children but knows this is impossible. '“Because I should so like to have children; but I don't

⁴⁷ Pacteau, 'The impossible referent', p. 66.

⁴⁸ Silverman stresses this important point in her article quoted above. Kristeva also emphasizes its importance in 'The maternal body'.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 162.

ever want it, I shouldn't like to have them".⁴⁷

Beverly and Elly seek also to make up for a second loss – the loss of imaginary wholeness. This loss of course is only intelligible *retroactively* through representation.⁴⁸ The twins' symbolic attempt to cut the cord which binds them is also, paradoxically, an attempt to seek reunification – but in their own bodies, not in the maternal body. They thus seek to make up for a double loss – the loss which arises with awareness of sexual difference and the earlier loss of imaginary wholeness. The desire for complete union with the ideal other, in this case one's twin, implies a desire to return to an earlier time in one's history: a time beyond that of the symbiotic union with the mother, a time beyond even that of the beginnings of consciousness and awareness of objects, a time which reaches back to pre-birth when the embryo existed in total harmony with the body of the mother, suspended in the waters of the womb – an intrauterine haven. It is this desire, the narcissistic desire to find oneself in the other, which leads ultimately to death.

A third motif expressed in the film's final scene relates to the maternal figure. The twins attempt to seek reunification in relation to their own bodies, not the body of the mother. Yet in the final image there is a clear suggestion of the maternal body. Throughout their lives the twins have cared for each other, the one alternately playing the maternal role for the other. When Beverly falls ill, Elliot nurses him as if he were the mother. In his attempt to sever the imaginary cord by cutting open Elly's stomach, Beverly takes on the role of the mother which he had assigned to Claire in his nightmare. The twins' delight in discovering Claire – the woman who is, in Elliot's words, 'fabulously rare' – suggests a search for the phallic mother, the mother of imaginary wholeness, not the mother of separations. The final image of the twins locked together in a serene, eternal/maternal embrace suggests Kristeva's description of one (of two) attitudes to the maternal body which have dominated western art – the attitude which sees the maternal body as marked by 'the luminous serenity of the irrepresentable'.⁴⁹

The extent to which phallic masculinity in our culture represents an impossible fantasy is borne out by this image. Unable to accept the possibility of symbolic castration, the male hysteric displaces his anxiety onto the body of woman, while simultaneously entering into a search for the impossible: abolition of sexual difference and reunification with the body of the Other. Predictably, however, the self-contained form of the hermaphrodite is fashioned from the bodies of two men – there is still no place for woman in a culture where the male principle dominates. However, like many of the Medusa's hysterical male victims, the Mantle twins have paid the price of self-delusion with their lives: they have been turned to stone in death.

In his analysis of classical cinema, Raymond Bellour argues that

50 Janet Bergstrom, 'Enunciation and sexual difference', *Camera Obscura*, nos. 3–4 (1979), p. 55.

its narrative form invariably constructs 'a massive, imaginary reduction of sexual difference to a narcissistic doubling of the masculine subject'.⁵⁰ *Dead Ringers* constructs this reduction and doubling not only in terms of its narrative structure but also in its use of one actor to play two roles. In this context, *Dead Ringers* creates the impossible situation whereby the subject or protagonist appears able to see from the place from which it is seen. Through special effects and cinematic trickery, the male protagonist is represented as a transcendental subject, identifying with itself as a pure act of perception. The signs of phallic panic which run through *Dead Ringers* point to the impossible nature of the narcissistic fantasy which lies at the heart not only of masculinity but also of the representation of phallic masculinity in the cinematic apparatus.

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New traditionalism and post-feminism: TV does the Home

ELSPETH PROBYN

In the recent Canadian film, *A Winter Tan*, (Burroughs, Clark, Frizzell, Walker, Weissman, 1988) the protagonist says that she is taking a vacation from feminism. This holiday ends with her death. While this independent and communally written, directed and produced film explores and deconstructs the very image of 'woman' as it offers seemingly uncaptured moments of one woman pleasing herself with young Mexican boys, it nonetheless left me somewhat uneasy. In part my unease stemmed from the ways in which the film self-consciously winked at feminism, the ways in which feminism is held at a distance – in the air but not quite there. The film positions itself as coming, quite literally, after feminism (Maryse Holder, the character played by Jackie Burroughs has left behind the college where she taught feminist literary criticism). For Maryse 'there is feminism and then there's fucking',¹ and in line with a certain understanding of what comes after feminism, the film gives us the experienced mind and body of a woman now out for herself. As she talks to us, to the camera, as she waits for the last return of her lover and presumed killer, we are to understand that she inhabits and controls the excess that she lives. But in the end she does die, leaving behind the literary traces which have enabled the film (this is, after all, a true story).

One question that *A Winter Tan* immediately raises is: What happens when you take a break from feminism? Implicit to the film is the construction of feminism as a moral discourse – as Maryse puts it: 'It must have been to curb my natural sluttishness that I became a feminist in the first place'.² The film gives us feminism as

¹ Quoted in Jane Weinstock, 'Out of her mind: fantasies of the 26th New York Film Festival', *Camera Obscura*, 19, (1989), p. 138.

² cited in Weinstock, *ibid.*

A Winter Tan
(Courtesy of Films Transit Inc.,
Canada/Institute of Contemporary
Arts, London.)



a coherent political line, if not a secure home. And when women leave this safe place, when they step off the line, they're in trouble: for all her freedom, Maryse is represented as quite painfully bulimic – a fact that becomes a metaphor for her sexual binges. The conclusion seems to be that women can be either feminists or in Maryse's words, 'a thing to plug', but if you try to be both (like Maryse) you die. And indeed, if one digs a little deeper into the logic which motivates this, one finds a fairly old moral: 'seemingly self-sufficient women in their thirties and forties pay dearly for their independence'.³

³ *ibid.*, pp. 140–41

In a review of several current films, Jane Weinstock states: 'It would seem, then, that we are facing a historical condition: women everywhere are falling apart. Not that this is anything new, but this disintegration is now being presented as an insidious effect of feminism'.⁴ While I'm not sure that women are actually falling apart at the moment, what we can see is an interesting conjuncture of discourses that are re-positioning women in the home. On any Tuesday night in North America you can see at least four different versions of the home and each one of them has an indirect relation to the discursive articulation of women and the home. Thus the premise of the humour of *Who's the Boss?* is that women can have full-time jobs while the husband stays at home. *Wonder Years* uses its mid 60's location to replay the suburban home as safe haven. It is, however, a home that both the audience and the programme know will be soon disturbed. In this scenario Mom is the warden and wet blanket; the grown-up voice over of the thirteen year old protagonist tells us that 'it's hard struggling for manhood when your Mom weighs fifty pounds more than you'. *Roseanne* opens with

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 140



Roseanne
(Courtesy of C4 television)

outside shots of the warmly lit house. Once inside, however, it becomes clear that Roseanne Barr rules the home with high irony. From irony we move to truth with the mythic realism of *thirtysomething*'s home as moral sanctity.

In many ways these homes correspond to different visions of generations of feminism, a sort of 'vulgarization' of feminist discourses. Thus, underlying *Who's the Boss?* is a seventies liberal feminism insisting on women's rights to equality of employment; underneath *Wonder Years* lies Betty Friedan's articulation of the suburban home housing the 'problem which has no name'; *Roseanne* updates the seventies line and gives the wife and mother all power: economic, social as well as affective control over her family; and then with *thirtysomething* we have a post-feminist vision of the home to which women have 'freely' chosen to return. Of course, the word 'feminism' is never mentioned in any of these shows; it's not even there as what Judith Mayne calls, 'an echo effect'.⁵ Rather, feminism and feminist ideas are totally submerged – it is the word that cannot be said. However, feminism can also be seen as the

5 Judith Mayne, 'I A Law and prime-time television', *Discourse*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1988), p. 42

Other to these versions of women and home. And it is feminism as Other which articulates the discourses of 'post-feminism' and 'the new traditionalism'.

The questions I want to raise here have to do with the ways in which that Other is suppressed in order to allow for a new generation of television programmes commonly called 'female-centred'. This recentring of women in the family and the home constitutes an important conjunctural moment. In situating the re-appearance of the home as conjunctural I want to recall Althusser's description of the 'backwardnesses, forwardnesses, survivals and unevenness of development which *co-exist* in the structure of the real historical present'.⁶ In other words, prime-time's re-articulation of women and the home cannot be seen as hermetically or hermeneutically sealed – to a certain extent, its meanings are up for grabs. If indeed these visions of home have an affective purchase (which seems to be the case in terms of audience loyalties and the network's strategic use of these shows) then we have to start thinking about the positivity of discourses that focus on the home; discourses framed in terms like new traditionalism and post-feminism.

However, I should also state that my interest in, and understanding of, the circulation of post-feminism as a public discourse is a local one – or at least, a North American one. Thus while British feminist theorists like Angela McRobbie can convincingly argue that post-feminism also represents a political and semiotic playfulness,⁷ and others, like John Caughie⁸ can present the positivity of the new slew of North American television drama series, my approach will be a little warier. While I do want to think about how we can theorize the post-fem/new trad trend without losing sight of its affectivity, I do speak from a political situation which is now ruled by what Ad Man of the Year, Richard Wirthlin (the brain behind Reagan's image), characterizes as one where 'the language of values is the language of emotions'.⁹ That language is currently articulating Reagan's project to protect ('they're going to steal our symbols and slogans: words like community and the family') with Bush's aim to guide America into a kinder, gentler family ('a thousand points of light, that is my mission'). On the other side of the 'longest undefended border', in Canada the language of Real Women has gained more and more ground. This summer the language of the family allowed for two slighted boyfriends to gain injunctions prohibiting their former girlfriends from obtaining abortions in Canada. While I am not going to construct any strict equivalence between political realities and television fiction, I do think that the discourses of the family, of new traditionalism, and post-feminism are in the air and need to be addressed by feminists.

At the very least, the currency of these discourses recalls with

6 Louis Althusser, 'The object of Capital', in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans., Brewster (London: NLB, 1975), p. 106.

7 Angela McRobbie, paper presented at the conference, 'Communications and Cultural Studies: Convergences and Divergences', Carleton University, Ottawa, April 1989.

8 John Caughie, 'The problem of being thirtysomething', *New Statesman and Society*, 19 May, 1989, p. 43.

9 Bill Moyers, *Bill Moyers: The Public Mind* (PBS, November 1989).

some force the postmodern refusal of representation: in other words, can we still maintain that feminism can represent, or stand in for, all women? The terms of the new family are indeed a challenge to feminism. Nevertheless, I think that they can be used positively to question certain current trends within cultural interpretation. Thus, the post-feminist trend in television raises in my mind aspects of cultural criticism which revolve around the figure of the feminine. Later on I will turn to a certain tendency I see in some cultural studies criticism to collapse feminism into the post in the name of feminine.

However, the first question to be dealt with is where and what is 'post-feminism' and the 'new traditionalism'? During its brief glory the film, *A Winter Tan*, was, for example, immediately labelled by reviewers as 'post-feminist'. While to my mind the rather depressing ending disqualifies this film as post-feminist, one needn't look far to find other examples of the boom. For instance, the new women now populating prime-time were recently sanctioned by being *Newsweek's* cover story. Across the smiling face of Murphy Brown, the headline read: 'How Women are Changing TV'. The authors state that 'The feminization of television has surprisingly little to do with feminism'¹⁰ and go on to list 'the unprecedented number of series featuring virtually all-female casts': *China Beach*, *Heartbeat* (recently deceased), and *Nightingale*, as well as *Designing Women* and *Golden Girls*. The authors also coined the term 'female-centred' to describe shows like *Murder, She Wrote*. Surprisingly enough, this term wasn't stretched to include the hottest shows of the season: *thirtysomething*, *Roseanne*, or *LA Law*. While Murphy describes herself as feeling like 'June Cleaver on acid', *thirtysomething* has Hope, the serene mother, surrounded by several women in various stages of distress. The large figure of Roseanne Barr embraces both the traditional family as well as her scathing and funny critiques of the very notion of motherhood. Meanwhile, *LA Law* combines the workplace as family with Stuart and Anne's real life and television marriage and their search for a child. In these instances and others, we can see that there is a new and active articulation of successful women who want something more. As that noted post-feminist, Madonna, puts it: 'Life is a mystery/Everyone must stand alone/I hear you call my name and it feels like home . . .'. In their ambiguity these words can be used to sum up the two principles that frame a post-feminist ontology: the world's a crazy place and you have to fight for yourself but at the end of the day you can always go home. In television terms, this means that you can be a top corporate lawyer and be pregnant (*LA Law*); a hot shot current affairs anchor and consider single parenthood (*Murphy Brown*); or you can just *choose* to stay home, and indeed *be* home (*thirtysomething*).

In other words, you can have your post-feminism at the same time

¹⁰ 'How Women Are Changing TV',
Newsweek, 13 March, 1989,
p. 48.

as your new traditionalism. In fact, the two go so handily together that it's hard to have one without the other. The ad executives who 'discovered' New Traditionalism are succinct in their estimation of its appeal:

It was never an issue except among feminists who felt that we were telling women to stay home and have babies. We're saying that's okay. But that's not all we're saying. We're saying they have a choice. It's a tough world out there.¹¹

11 cited in Leslie Savan, 'Up Ad', *The Village Voice*, 7 March, 1989, p. 49.

As Leslie Savan has pointed out, new traditionalism has become synonymous with a new age of 'choiceoisie' and it is precisely this ideology of choice that articulates new traditionalism and post-feminism. According to *Good Housekeeping*, new traditionalism marks a 'reaffirmation of family values unmatched in recent history'.¹² *Good Housekeeping's* magazine ads feature happily reformed women returned to the family home and flanked by children. Seemingly contrary to the ad agency's laissez-faire attitude to kids or not ('hey, we're saying that's okay') the television spot for *Good Housekeeping* bluntly tells us that:

12 *ibid.*

Mother's haven't changed. Kids haven't changed. Families haven't changed. Love hasn't changed. What is fundamental to our lives, what really matters . . . hasn't changed.¹³

13 *ibid.*

In the best logic of advertising, new traditionalism both symbolizes and reproduces the solid nature of the status quo as it urges women to get on the bandwagon, to buy into the old as new (as Savan says 'the old-fashioned as fashion'). Thus the material world is portrayed as unchanging. It stays the same; it's just that the articulations have to be reformed with that flighty and eminently unstable group: women. The categories of 'mother's', 'kids', 'love', and even 'life' are presented as immutable truths which only those feminist 'changelies' would not choose. In other words, the ideology of choiceoisie operates not on choice but as a reaffirmation of what has supposedly always been there, always already there for the right women. Thus, in an age of ironies, it is not surprising that the *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval rewards those who already have been given it and reproves those who don't (those who can't, in any number of currencies, afford this type of choice). Quite simply, new traditionalism hawks the home as the 'natural choice' – which means, of course, no choice.

If new traditionalism naturalizes the home into a fundamental and unchanging site of love and fulfilment, the discourse of post-feminism turns on a re-articulation of that choice. Post-feminism then returns a sense of difference to the rather flat landscape of new traditionalism. After all, if the new trad home is the 'natural' option, why or how would anyone even consider anything else? Post-feminism thus allows choiceoisie to be posed as the possibility

thirtysomething
(Courtesy of C4 television)



of choosing between the home or the career, the family or the successful job. Thus in television terms, *thirtysomething* gives us a new traditionalist home complete with Dads getting in touch with their kids, and at the same time post-feminism lends piquance as, in the background, we hear the ticking of the omnipresent biological clock. In one episode of *thirtysomething* the repressed returns with a vengeance as we see Melissa (the carefree but increasingly anxiously *single* artist) in a dream sequence. She is pinned down on an enormous clock in the shape of an ovary while possible sperm donors appear. In a simple twist of fate, American television has gone from the coyness of Lucille Ball's on-air pregnancy (where the P word was never mentioned) to *Maude*'s confrontation with abortion, to the panic of the ticking of the biological clock in the same time-frame as the woman who is now thirty something years old. Of course the battles to get the networks to allow certain words to be spoken (like abortion) are forgotten even in the most self-reflexively intertextual of programmes like *thirtysomething*. Rather the attention is turned to novel ways of presenting birth scenes, as in a recent episode which telescoped the whole affair from end to beginning.

The ticking of the clock and the search for a mate reproduces an individual urgency masked as an historical one. One of the ways in which post-feminism is effective is precisely this marking of urgency as 'the problem' for women in the late eighties. Indeed the representation of women in gynaecological terms (as a limited number of eggs and a dwindling bunch of hormones) has become (or re-emerged as) the subject of popular humour. One instance of this particular hailing can be seen in the rather smug comic strip *Cathy*. Recently the strip had Cathy and her friend reading a book entitled 'How to Flirt'. Above them the text reads: 'Some call it "The New Traditionalism". Some call it "Retrofeminism". Some call it a bad joke.' The text continues with a genealogy of the 'post-feminist woman' and tells us that, 'many women who postponed marriage for careers are now trying to discover the delicate, feminine art of wooing a man's heart'. Cathy's friend then greets a strange man with, 'Hello. I want your baby'.

Smoking guns and descriptions aside, it's now time to turn on the theory. I want to do this in two ways: first, by asking what can be said about these popular discourses; and second, to use these images to show up some weak spots in current theorizing.

Two of the most important terms and horizons in feminist criticism are the concepts of gender and sexuality. Projects of interpreting representations (whether filmic, televisual, photographic or literary) have involved questions of how gendered subjects are constructed as sexed objects and positioned by images. While I am not now going to attempt to give a history of feminist theories of representation, I hope that we can take certain major interpretive paradigms for granted. In other words, I am thinking of feminist psychoanalytic film theory as a condition of possibility for any present theorizing. However, at the same time, I will insist that the 'thirty something' generation of television shows requires different analytic tools than did the classic Hollywood genres. I also think we can acknowledge that there are now different generations of feminists; what Rosi Braidotti calls 'discursive generation gaps . . . [with] each generation [having to] reckon with its own problematics'.¹⁴ The emergence of the discourse of 'choiceoisie' strikes me as one of the problematic objects of my generation. While it would be easy to state, as I have already intimated, that this choiceoisie is no choice, there are aspects of the post-feminist discourse that hit home. As a woman in my early thirtysomething, newly in a tenure-track university job that promises retirement thirty years from now, I am a ripe candidate for the kids and home hype. While I am certainly not saying that the post-feminist discourse describes my life or my options, it does, nonetheless, provide a public language to talk about me and other similar women – it may even provide women with words to talk about themselves. And it is precisely this aspect, this function of discourses that has to be dealt

¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, 'The politics of ontological difference', in Teresa Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 91.

with. It is also this analytic level of the work of discourse (what Michele Le Doeuff calls '*le faire*' of the discourse) that is ignored in much contemporary television criticism.

Meaghan Morris has recently argued that cultural studies is currently going through a 'banal' moment. The banalities are especially clear for Morris in the extreme positions of Jean Baudrillard and John Fiske. While it is clear that Morris is not rejecting either postmodernism or cultural studies, she does question the limitations of our critical vocabulary and 'the level of "enunciative" practice'.¹⁵ It is the way in which certain 'solutions' are repeatedly trundled out that bothers Morris. As she says, 'the critical vocabulary available to people wanting to theorize the discriminations that they make in relation to their own experience of popular culture . . . is today extraordinarily depleted'.¹⁶ In other words, what happens if you like some post-feminist trappings but still find the discourse problematic? The cultural studies' dictum that the masses are not cultural dupes remains important but the largess with which some terms are handed out sometimes can get slightly silly. Brought down to the specificities of oneself, it is unlikely that one could proudly say, 'well, I'm a resisting reader'. Arthur Kroker likes to call this approach, 'theory as life insurance', and while there's nothing really wrong with having an insurance (an optimism of the will) do we really need such blanket policies? As Morris puts it: 'the vox pop style of cultural studies . . . offer[s] us the sanitized world of a deodorant commercial where there's always a way to redemption'.¹⁷

Recently redemption has taken on a feminine form. Whether it is due to a more wide-spread acceptance of feminism as a critical discourse, or whether it is thanks to post-structuralist and postmodern articulations of the feminine as disruption, resistance is now gendered. While there are positive aspects to this move, the currency of the feminine can also be seen as an example of the current poverty of critical vocabulary. An instance of this can be seen in John Fiske's recent turn to 'the feminine'. While Fiske is not alone in the appropriation of the feminine, his recent work does reveal the limitations of condensing a 'vox-pop' style with a mode of textual analysis that posits sexuality as the redemptive horizon. His use of the feminine as a critical figure merits some consideration because of the way in which he constructs a category of feminine sexuality which then serves to guarantee his textual reading of television. In his book, *Television Culture*, Fiske posits a series of equivalences between practices and an ontological category of femininity: 'Feminine work, feminine viewing practices, and feminine texts combine to produce decentred, flexible, multifocused feminine subjectivities'.¹⁸ Fiske gets his model of the feminine from the quite particular work of Shere Hite and Nancy Chodorow. He then uses this construction of feminine sexuality to guarantee his

15 Meaghan Morris, 'Banality in Cultural Studies', *Discourse*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1988), p. 19.

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.*, p. 21.

18 John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 196.

reading of how (and why) women watch soap operas. While men 'come', women, according to Fiske,

have no such final achievement. The emphasis on seduction and on its continuous pleasure and power is appropriate to a contemporary feminine subjectivity, for that subjectivity has necessarily been formed through a constant experience of powerlessness and subordination.¹⁹

To state the obvious, there are problems here. Apart from his implicit heterosexual bounds, Fiske has turned a hypostasized model of sexuality into the grounds for resistance. Fiske argues that soap operas constitute a 'feminine aesthetic' because of their 'lack of narrative closure and the multiplicity of . . . plots'.²⁰ This form is then made to accord with a feminine sensibility: 'It can be seen more positively as an articulation of a specific feminine definition of desire and pleasure that is contrasted with the male pleasure of final success'.²¹ So in Fiske's account, the feminine can be used as what Mayne calls a 'swinging door': genres are defined as feminine and then correspond to what he has defined as a feminine sexuality and subjectivity. These feminine genres can even allow women to learn and practice their feminine 'skills': 'they provide training in the feminine skills of "reading people", and are the means of exercising the feminine ability to understand the gap between what is meant and what is said'.²²

It seems to me that one of the things that the discourse of post-feminism is saying is that the question of 'what do women want' (*Was will das Wieb?*) has been answered. The answer is that they want 'choice'. This is perfectly in keeping with the kind of liberal feminism that floats through post-feminism and new traditionalism. It is, however, a liberal feminism shorn of its political programme – it is choice freed of the necessity of thinking about the political and social ramifications of the act of choosing. It also closes that gap that Fiske mentions. As George Bush puts it: 'read my lips' – what is meant is what is said.

One of the positivities that this offers is that it reveals Fiske's enigmatic feminine as out-dated. It also confirms the limitations of a text-based analysis of the *thirtysomething* generation of television. In other words, the cultural importance of these programmes can not be read off their surfaces. In the programmes that I've mentioned, the feminine is not an enigma to be discovered or interpreted (by men); she is the site of prime-time television. As Sacha Torres has recently argued, 'the unanswered and persistent question . . . is masculinity, not femininity. *thirtysomething* knows, or at least thinks it knows, where women's "place", spatially and affectively, is'.²³ Thus, the feminine as a hermeneutic horizon will not tell you much. The question is outside of the text, in the larger discursive re-articulation of the feminine and the home in the name of post-

19 *ibid.*, pp. 187–88.

20 *ibid.*, p. 180.

21 *ibid.*, p. 181.

22 *ibid.*, p. 183.

23 Sacha Torres, 'Melodrama, masculinity and the family: *thirtysomething* as therapy', *Camera Obscura*, 19 (1989), p. 92.

thirtysomething
(Courtesy of C4 television)



feminism. The postmodern devices employed in these programmes (such as extensive quotation from television's and popular culture's past) already has interpreted itself as text. Thus, the project of the critic in front of isolated texts becomes rather redundant. We (the audience, the text) know what it 'means'.

The interpretive task of the feminist critic, therefore, lies elsewhere. This is to say that the politics of these programmes can no longer be identified solely at the level of the textual system. After all, shows like *thirtysomething* are quite upfront about what they represent (in both senses of the word): As Ken Olin/Michael Steedman put it:

Nobody on this show is presuming that the problems of these characters are as serious as the problems of the homeless and the mentally ill and the tragedy of war . . . [b]ut that is not to say that this generation doesn't face a set of issues that is valid too.²⁴

Of course, this type of statement doesn't guarantee any particular shade of politics either, but it does push us outside of the text – it begs the question of what these discourses do extratextually.

Taking from the French feminist philosopher, Michele Le Doeuff, we can begin to ask what the work of a discourse is. While the discourses of the family and on post-feminism are being re-produced in *thirtysomething* etc., they are also producing and re-positioning lived relations in regard to 'women's places' and the home. Le Doeuff argues that we can take discourses as 'points of view'. Instead of discourses replicating reality, the discourse as a point of view can be trained on itself or what it is supposed to represent. In

²⁴ cited in Torres, *ibid.*, p. 91

²⁵ Michele Le Doeuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989), pp. 105–6.

²⁶ Jay Rosen, 'thirtysomething', *Tikkun*, 4:4 (1989), p. 31.

Le Doeuff's terms: 'it can construct questions and modes of analysis about the patch of reality that it is drawn from'.²⁵ While, of course, Le Doeuff is talking about philosophical systems and not television shows, her analysis of the functions of discourse can be used to pose epistemological questions about how television makes sense. In other words, this is to look at the ways in which the discourse of post-feminism both circulates in television programmes and is lodged elsewhere – within what Le Doeuff calls 'the primacy of the real'. However, let me specify that 'a primacy of the real' is not over and beyond television. As a level of abstraction, 'the primacy of the real' describes the articulations that are made between television's representations and those we live: self-representations. Thus the prime-time discourses of the family or of the home or of women are affective precisely because they lodge in the real; they are attached to other ideological frameworks. These discourses also connect people together in different ways. They draw actual women to conversations about actual families and homes. The *thirtysomething* generation of programmes, including their regional offspring such as the Canadian shows, *Street Legal* and *ENG*, also can be seen as articulating a sameness, bringing us all into a family, a home. They want to create a happy sameness in all of our everyday lives.

However, that point of sameness when the discourses catch up with each other (as one reviewer asked himself after watching *thirtysomething*: 'good lord, are my problems so common that even television can pick up on them?'²⁶), is also the point when the discourse can be used to question itself. Simply put, we begin to question the differences between the currency of the family, etc., on television and the family as an institutional discourse. To take a recent example, one of this season's *thirtysomething* episodes actually introduced a gay character, Russell. The story line explicitly drew a parallel between Russell getting together with one of Michael and Elliott's colleagues and the representation of Melissa's affair with a younger man as problematic. In alternating scenes we see Melissa's nightmarish version of Lee (the younger man) meeting the 'family' (Hope et al.), and Russell and Peter lying in bed discussing the loss of their friends through AIDS. Now the reading of this episode can go in any direction: from 'about time that they actually broke up the heterosexual contract that rules the show', to disgust at the way in which AIDS is trivialized and pathologized in the context of Melissa's angst over age-difference, to inside ironic laughter because the actress who plays Melissa is thought to be gay. Meanwhile, the most widely read agony column, *Ann Landers*, had that week come out in favour of same-sex couples. While these two discursive moments don't guarantee a thing, they do point to ways in which the discourse of the family also raises its own problematic: does the family have to be heterosexual? In other words, there is a positivity in the ways in which discourses circulate on television that

allows for questions to be raised about how they are also lodged in 'the real'. In a very local way, *Roseanne*'s gripes against motherhood and children are being heard at the same time as the introduction of a Quebec policy to give (not pay) women \$3000 for their third child. The recognition by most of Quebec society that this was a paltry amount coincided with a wide condemnation of the Quebec Court ruling that the fetus had rights.

Now again, these examples don't prove anything except that the different articulations of post-feminism and the family are hard to gauge in advance. However, instead of reifying the *thirtysomething* generation of television as 'quality television' or writing it off as mere ideological replay, I suggest that we use these discourses to focus upon the changing social climate which we live and watch. This obviously means that the work of the post-feminist and new traditionalist discourses will be very different in Quebec than in Scotland. It also means that the positivity of post-feminism has to be judged according to its conjunctural work. However, far from initiating a break from feminism, I think that the current discursive landscape is a condition of possibility for generations of feminist analysis. And in the midst of the reborn family and the refurbished home, it is more important than ever that we make the personal political and theoretical (Braidotti).

On history and the cinema

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

Cinema in history

The history of the cinema is the history of the 20th century. Cinema is embedded deep into what one might call the external histories of the century – those of economics and politics for example – but even more deeply into the history of modern subjectivity.

This is a thought to be borne in mind as the cinema approaches its imminent centenary. Having come into existence around 1895, the cinema is in fact slightly older than the 20th century, but for the first five or ten years it did not have a distinct social presence. From the early years of the century, however, the cinema is witness to, and participant in, all major world developments, from wars and revolutions to ideological and demographic shifts and to the subtly changing patterns of everyday life. The Belle Epoque, the Jazz Age, Austerity, the Swinging Sixties . . . are all part of cinema, and of history, in the same way as the Russian or Cuban revolutions, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, the Berlin Wall or Tienanmen Square.

Since 1945, however, the multiple purposes which the cinema served during the first half of the century have increasingly come to be performed by television: not only performed but also transformed, since television diminishes the role of spectacle, which is fundamental to cinema, in favour of a domesticated immediacy, bringing events to the spectator, rather than the spectator to the event. The role of the cinema has become that of providing a showcase for feature films, leaving to television and video the wider range of reportage, instruction, propaganda, introspection, entertainment, etc., which the cinema formerly shared with radio and newspapers.¹

¹ Since 1839 is as good a date as any for the invention of photography, we have a roughly fifty-year sequence for the invention or first practical deployment of photography (1839), cinema (early 1890s), television (late 1930s) and the next major stage of development, which is going to be the linking of TV, video and audio to home computers, initiated in the late 1980s and likely to become a reality around . . . 1995.

Television has two powers which the cinema lacks. Firstly, it has a power of incorporation. Television can absorb and relay on to its small screen and loudspeaker the products of other media and discursive practices: it can therefore function as an all-purpose vehicle for carrying movies, music, jokes, chat, journalism and information of all kinds. Secondly, it has the power of instantaneity. Events in Berlin or Bucharest can be seen elsewhere in Europe or in Asia or the Americas, at the very moment at which they are taking place. Although only a fraction of television output is ever broadcast live, this fraction is immensely significant. It really is instant history in the sense that what will become record is, momentarily, globally present as the event unfolds. Because of its ability to be present, moreover, it does more than record: it testifies and performs. Whether it is the draw for the FA Cup or the dragging of Ceausescu's son into the recently captured TV studio, the showing of an event on television is also its performance, the attestation that the event has taken place and that certain consequences follow.

It has been observed that Vietnam was the first television war. It was so in the sense that it was the first war whose events could be made visible, elsewhere, at the moment at which they took place – or, if not at the very moment, then very close to that moment. It was a war which the public in the United States could observe immediately, and close to – commented on and narrativized to a degree, as is inevitable, but more immediate than any preceding foreign war. The fact that the war was watched, not just by generals at HQ with maps, but by the general public on TV screens, affected both the way the war was fought and its outcome. It was also a war about which, perhaps mercifully, there have been few movies.

By contrast the preceding wars of the 20th century were radio and cinema wars. In fact the first cinema war, the Spanish-American War of 1898, was prior to the century. This was also a newspaper war, a fact subsequently immortalized by the cinema in *Citizen Kane*. In Welles' film, the journalist Wheeler, sent to cover events in Cuba, protests at being asked to provide copy about a war that is not taking place. 'Could send you prose poems,' Wheeler cables, but, 'there is no war in Cuba.' Kane cables back: 'Dear Wheeler, You provide the prose poems, I'll provide the war.' This story is not an invention, but is based on actual communications sent by the newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst (on whom, as is well known, the figure of Kane is based), to his correspondent Richard Harding Davies and to the painter Frederic Remington, also employed to provide pictures of the war.² What is perhaps less well known, because not so inscribed in legend, is the extent to which early 'newsreels' of this war also contained large components of invention – with model ships being exploded in tanks to simulate the battle of Santiago Bay – and staging for the camera – as with the so-

2 For a fuller account, see M. Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (London: British Film Institute and Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), pp. 22–24; and E. Buscombe (ed.), *The BFI Companion to the Western* (London: André Deutsch, 1988).

called charge up San Juan Hill.³ It would be wrong to regard this material as, in a serious sense, forged, since the deception planned did not really amount to a falsification of the historical record, and in any case the ethic of authenticity of the filmed record was not yet in place: the early film-makers were doing no more nor less than a newspaper editor might have done, merging eyewitness reports with information received from despatches and other sources. But it is interesting that within three years of being ‘invented’ the cinema was already inserting itself into the problematic of the historical record and re-marking the boundaries of fact and fiction, truth and falsehood, in history.

In general, wars and revolutions offer the most visible test case of the cinema as historical agent. The most powerful single image of the Russian Revolution is probably that of the storming of the Winter Palace in October 1917. But the image that has become history is not a documentary one; it is the one provided by Eisenstein in *October*, a fictional reconstruction made for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution in 1927.⁴ Pulled out of their dramatic and symbolic context, Eisenstein’s pictures, such as that of Antonov Ovseyenko jumping on the table, provide for viewers of television documentaries today, as they did for cinema spectators in 1927, the basic metonymic images of revolution as historical event.

Most of the imagery of the October Revolution is retrospective, created by Soviet film-makers in the 1920s and beyond. Other events, however, have had their record written for them at the time of happening. There is in these cases both a deliberate process at work – an attempt to ensure that certain representations become record – and a less controlled process by which particular images or narrations become fixed in memory as canonical, and retain this canonical status by being, literally, re-presented. In the case of the Second World War, there are certain canonical images of the Blitz, which tend to come either from photographs published in *Picture Post* or from documentary films such as *London Can Take It* (1940). Not only were these images effective in their own time, but they are now regularly recycled on television to renew historical memory.⁵

On the other hand, the war in the Pacific from 1942 onwards, and that in Europe from the invasion of Sicily to the German surrender, were prevailingly represented through fictions: some made at, or close to, the time; some made subsequently. These fictions provided not so much images (in the sense in which *October*, or the end of *All Quiet on the Western Front* [1930], provide images for memories) as models of narrativity. Between 1942 and 1945, Hollywood turned out over thirty feature films dealing with battles then being fought. With a few exceptions (such as Wellman’s *The Story of GI Joe* [1945], Ford’s *They Were Expendable* [1945] or Walsh’s *Objective Burma!* [1945]) these combat films were for the most part forgettable, and have duly been forgotten; but at the time they acted

4 See Yuri Tsivian, ‘Eisenstein and Russian symbolist culture: an unknown script of *October*’, paper presented at the Oxford Conference on Eisenstein, 1988; publication forthcoming in Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (eds), *Eisenstein Rediscovered* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

5 ‘*London Can Take It* is a film which everyone has seen, yet which few have seen recently in the form given to it by its makers. Fragments of it appear, longer or shorter, rejigged in detail or assimilated whole, whenever a television programme makes reference to the air raids of World War II.’ Dai Vaughan, *Portrait of an Invisible Man: The Working Life of Stewart McAllister*, Film Editor (London: British Film Institute, 1983), p. 1.

6 By combat films here I mean those war-films which concentrate on the representation of military action. See Kathryn R. Kane, *American Combat Films of World War Two*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Iowa, 1974.

as demonstrations that war was manageable – horrible perhaps, but containable as an experience within the trajectory of a narrative.⁶ What happened in the death camps, of course, and widely on the Eastern front, was not containable in conventional narratives, but the war in the West and in the Pacific was represented from a point of view innocent of horrors that exceeded the possibilities of representation.

To focus on the representation of war and revolution, however, or indeed on the representation of historical events of any kind, runs the risk of confining discussion within the framework of a basically realistic notion of the cinema. The issue tends to become whether a particular representation was or was not 'true' (true, that is, to a reality defined in some other discourse and which cinema then relates) or whether 'truth' (and the spectator who assumes s/he is in presence of the truth) is being manipulated. These issues are not unimportant, because the cinema is a realistic medium – and is widely believed to be such – to the extent that it can both show what is, and can represent things that are presumed to have been. One of its operations is to confer a certain status of reality on what it shows. If it shows an actor playing Antonov Ovseyenko jumping on a table, then it is most strongly implied that the real Antonov Ovseyenko did himself jump on that table, waving a revolver and threatening the members of the Provisional Government. So strong is the presumption of the cinema's realist and truth-telling vocation that even overtly fictional films are regularly criticized for historical untruth. Winston Churchill, for example, took deep offence at *Objective Burma!* because of the way it represented the recapture of Burma as an American achievement (led by Errol Flynn) rather than British. Churchill might have been epistemologically confused, but his confusion was typical: there is in fact no clear border at which cinematic representations pass unequivocally from the attested real to the avowedly fictional.

What is occluded by such examples is the way that cinema operates, independently of particular contents, in another register, which is that of the imaginary – not a timeless and unhistorical imaginary, but a specific twentieth-century imaginary which the cinema itself has formed. The reality effect of cinema is not just given by the fact of similitude or verisimilitude – the picture which resembles a thing or mimes an event, and is, therefore, a picture 'of' that thing or event. What is also needed is belief, the willingness of the psyche to accept the word and image of the cinema into its operation with or without regard for its referential truth. The cinema established itself very rapidly as a picturing and narrating mechanism capable of imposing on its spectators belief in the reality of what they are being shown or told – belief in the reality of leaves fluttering in the breeze in a Lumière film, or belief in the reality of Koko emerging from the black line in an 'Out of

7 This material is richly documented in a new book by the Italian historian Gian Piero Brunetta, *Buio in sala* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1989), to which I am indebted for the example which follows.

8 R. Kipling, 'Mrs. Bathurst', in *Traffics and Discoveries* (London: Macmillan, 1904), pp. 337–365, reprinted in Philip Oakes (ed.), *The Film Addict's Archive* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1977) and currently also available in Penguin Classics. See also Brunetta *Buio in Sala*, pp. 101–4.

9 'Mrs Bathurst' (1904), pp. 355–6.

the Inkwell'. Literature of the 1900s and 1910s abounds with references to the cinema as a machine for the creation of happy or unhappy illusion and with stories that hinge around the cinema's ability to make one believe the impossible.⁷ Suspension of disbelief was never a problem for the cinema.

A very interesting early example of the cinema's insertion into culture and of the operation of its imaginary truth effect is provided by a story of Rudyard Kipling's, 'Mrs. Bathurst', published in 1904.⁸ In this story, a sailor called Vickery, on shore leave in Cape Town, sees at a cinematograph show the image of a woman he had known in New Zealand some time previously. The film is of a train arriving at Paddington station and among the alighting passengers is, or appears to be, this Mrs Bathurst, a young widow who kept a hotel for sailors on the seafront near Auckland. Besides Vickery, his companions are also convinced that the fleeting image is indeed she, but for Vickery this becomes an obsession. He returns to the show every night and gets blind drunk each time after watching it. The day the cinematograph leaves town, he arranges to have a job assigned to him which will take him up-country. He is last heard of at Bloemfontein and his corpse is eventually found by a railway line a thousand miles away in what is now Zimbabwe.

The story is fascinating in many respects, not least for its narrative technique (Vickery's adventures and eventual destiny are pieced together by the other participants in the tale) and its picture of colonial life. As far as the role played by the cinematograph is concerned, it is interesting in the first place that it is the film that drives Vickery mad – or tips him over into madness, since the suggestion is that he was already a bit strange. But what is more interesting still is the way the story hinges on the referentiality of the obsessing image. The pictures, says one of the characters, were 'the real thing – alive and movin'.' 'I've seen 'em,' says another; 'Of course they are taken from the very thing itself.' Then, Mrs Bathurst appears on the screen, she is described as 'looking out straight at us', with 'a blindish look' that the sailors agree was characteristic of her in real life.⁹

While it is clearly that 'blindish' look that establishes a subjectivity for Mrs Bathurst (or her image), the key issue concerns her reality as an object (specifically, in this case, an object of desire). The reality-effect here embraces not only the notion of a presence, which could be fictional, but of a real reference: the presence is of someone known to be real elsewhere. The film which the sailors see, and which is enough to drive one of them round the bend, operates on the boundary between fact and fiction. The fiction invests real life because it is not only a fiction. Unlike mere stories, it has the ability to be seen to refer. But unlike a mere photograph, whose declarative function is to say that something once *was*, out there, the film in its movement inspires the illusion that something

still is: the psychic present prevails over the referential past.

In a sense the cinema has always operated on that boundary, though differently in its 'classical' than in its 'primitive' form. What Kipling intuitively in his story is something specific to the days when cinema was new, but the fundamental ambiguity of cinema has remained – and has passed to television not merely as an immanent property of the medium but as something to be exploited in all ways possible. In their activities along the boundary of fact and fiction, reality and pleasure, actual and imagined, cinema first, and then television, have established themselves as the principal repository of the social imaginary of the 20th century.

To say this is to say more than that cinema and television are and have been important in people's lives – that going to the cinema is treasured as a night out, or that the TV in the living room is an ever present accompaniment to social intercourse, true though these things may be. Nor is the historical role of cinema and television to be ascribed to the mere fact that they are, in the current phrase, bearers of 'moving images', since it is a fallacy to assume that just because something is a picture (which is all that image means in this context) it has any privileged relation to the world of the imaginary. People could spend all day watching 'images' on a cinema or TV screen and this fact would not be of the slightest interest to anyone except the purveyors of popcorn or TV dinners if what they watched did not have certain specific properties of which the most important is the ability to operate over different registers of reality.

There is, however, a difference in this respect between cinema and television, which is this: cinema operates with what is properly speaking an ambivalence, exploited in various ways but basically ineradicable; television, on the other hand, operates with a more or less deliberate confusion, expressed not at the level of its single components, but at that of their 'mix' or 'flow'. Television hops about: now it's live, now it's a recording; now there's a presenter, now an eyewitness; now the studio audience is laughing, now there is laughter but it sounds canned. The viewer compounds the confusion: the News is full of disasters; worse still Mrs Thatcher is visiting the scene, reach for the zapper; oh no, it's that dreary sitcom, try again; settle for the movie with Jack Nicholson . . .

In this context, debates about 'realism' (applied to the cinema) and 'mix' or 'flow' of programme (applied to television) are misguided because overly prescriptive. It is right to point to the essential ambivalence of the film image, to the fact that it is always both real and not-real in different ways, and to the degree of confusion between the various forms of simulation fused together in television, but there is no way in which this ambivalence and this confusion can be wished out of existence. While it is possible to prescribe a balance – in favour of more factuality, or more truthfulness, or whatever – ambivalence and confusion are here to

stay. What is more, they have been around for a long time. How we see the world as it is (mainly off the TV screen) and how we are able to recall it as it was (partly, though of course not exclusively, off the same screen) is already determined by the representations that have been made and by properties built into the way they function.

Cinema in the unfolding present

A major change has taken place in the cinema in the past ten years, which is that cinema no longer happens in the cinemas. Audience figures for cinemagoing have been in secular decline throughout most of the developed world since the 1950s. In Britain annual admissions are now hovering around the 80 million mark – about 5 per cent of what they were in the peak year of 1946. In the United States attendances have held up better, but in many countries where attendances remained high into the sixties, the fall, when it came, has been as drastic as in Britain. But film viewing has not stopped. It has just moved location. Films are now mostly viewed on the television screen, either broadcast or on video. The cinematic experience is still treasured, as is shown by the willingness of people in London to fork out £6 to watch a new release in a city centre cinema with a big screen and Dolby sound. But this is a minority pastime compared with the amount of home viewing that takes place of recent films on video and of both recent and old films on TV. No matter that the viewing experience is an impoverished one – small screen, poor sound, no sense of space or sharing with an audience. The convenience of not having to go out, the cheapness of video and of television, are irresistible.

As films in the cinemas get rarer, films on TV get more and more frequent. The number of films on British TV is still relatively low compared to the United States or to European countries like Italy, but it is set to rise as more channels become available. But Britain also has very high levels of video ownership, and time-shifting is a regular practice. Conscientious use of the video recorder means that libraries can be built up of films that have been on TV, and these libraries can be further enhanced by buying videos, often for less than £10, of films thought worth watching again and again.

This plethora, this superabundance of film on the small screen is in itself a massive semiotic transformation of everyday life. It seems, at first sight, the fulfilment of the surrealist's dream – as expressed, for example, by André Breton in *Nadia* – of immersion in an anonymous flow of collective images. What the surrealists were looking for was a way in which the unformed magma of popular culture could be used to break up the stale rationality of bourgeois art. They never posed the question from the interior of popular

culture of what sort of order and rationality already exists there. Popular culture is not just a site of entropy and disorder. On the contrary, it is of necessity highly ordered even if the mechanisms for maintaining its order seem relatively arbitrary by comparison with those of high culture. The Hit Parade, for example, and subsequently 'the charts', have for fifty years been a mechanism for rating records and regulating listening on a large scale. The release pattern of films has traditionally performed a similar regulatory function. Films in the cinema are customarily first-run, second-run, or (for a minority) repertory; they appear in the cinemas in a known order and hierarchy, mediated through the press and processes of collective decision. Video also has its order and hierarchy, which is that of the bookshop or library rather than the entertainments page or listing. And early television was ordered too: when there were limitations on the number of films shown on the box, each one was an event, which had its particular place in everyday cultural life.

The change that has taken place with (post-)modern television – what Umberto Eco has called 'neo-television' – is in the first instance a question of sheer number. There are more channels, they broadcast for more hours of day and night, and films take up a higher proportion of the schedules. With so many films being screened, it is impossible for each one to be contextualized for the viewer. In Britain, BBC 2 and Channel Four do make strenuous efforts to put films in context and even supply documentation to accompany some seasons, but there is no way this could be done across the board. Even if it was, it is not clear what use people would want to make of it: too much contextualization is as much a source of semiotic overload as too many films.¹⁰

The lack of contextualization of films in the age of neo-television is, as Eco has pointed out,¹¹ potentially deeply diseducative. It means that, although there are more films available, less is known about each one and about the relations of one another. But Eco's observations have fallen for the most part on deaf ears. As far as I can see, the response of most film intellectuals to the phenomenon is either very passive or very (not to say hyper-) active. Some revel in the sheer pleasure of being able to access so many movies, randomly, at the touch of a button. Some give up, decide they'd rather see movies in a cinema or not at all, and switch over to something harmless, like golf. Others, however, devote their lives to a systematic study of the schedules, noting when to go out and when to be in, what to watch during transmission and what to time-shift on to video.

None of these responses seems to me to provide in any way a generalizable model or to promote either an understanding of the phenomenon or a practical approach to the problems it poses for both film culture and culture at large.

What is particularly lacking, and hard to supply, amid the

¹⁰ It would in fact be possible, with cable and satellite, which have unused accessible information capacity on the signal, for a bit of text to be attached to films or other programmes being broadcast which viewers could access in order to get information about the film they had just tuned into. But as far as I know there are no service-providers with plans to do this.

¹¹ U. Eco, 'A guide to the Neo-Television of the 1980s', *Framework*, 25, (1984), pp. 18–27.

abundance, is any sense of history. Sixty years of film history – plus an occasional dip into the silent period – parades in front of our eyes without any indication of where it has been dredged up from, or that it is history at all. It is possible to date films approximately by cars and clothes and other indexical signifiers of period. Colour can help too (unless we get across-the-board colorization) to suggest that a film is likely to be post- rather than pre-1950 or so. But historical and costume films in particular are not easily dated. Dates of films are rarely transmitted or included in listings (with the commendable exceptions of the preview pages of *Radio Times* and *TV Times* and of course *City Limits* and *Time Out*). Everything is therefore displayed as if in a continuous present, with only the occasional connotator of pastness – such as black and white or the absence of dialogue – to indicate any discontinuity. Films are vaguely recognizable as ‘old’, but how old, and how their oldness relates to where we are now, is hard to determine. History is only ever now.

Television in this respect is like some imagined mathematical space, in which representations, whatever their origin, are displayed on a single boundless surface from which the dimensions of depth and historical time have been banished. In this two-dimensional space, whose only temporality is that of the schedules, differences are obliterated: differences of kind, in the sense that movies, music, reportage all appear there as ‘something on TV’; and differences of historical time, which are endlessly referred to but continually elude representation. Somehow it is necessary to restore the dimensions which have been lost.

Cinema history

In a note entitled ‘Some preliminary reference points’, placed at the beginning of his *Notes for an Introduction and an Approach to the Study of Philosophy and of the History of Culture*, Gramsci makes the assertion that ‘everyone is a philosopher’ in the sense of carrying around with them a ‘spontaneous philosophy’ composed of all the ideas, notions and usages with which one comes into contact. For Gramsci, critical thought begins not with an introspective void but with the examination of this spontaneous philosophy of which we are all the bearers. This philosophy, he says, is contained:

- 1) in language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content;
- 2) in common sense and good sense;
- 3) in popular religion and also therefore in the whole system of beliefs, superstitions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which surface collectively under the name of ‘folklore’.¹²

12 Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (III), edited by Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975) p. 1375. English translation in *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 323, and in *A Gramsci Reader*, edited by David Forgacs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 325. In both these volumes the translation (which is mine) follows an earlier Italian edition which describes beliefs, superstitions, etc. as ‘bundled together’ (*si affacciano*): I have taken the opportunity to correct it here to ‘[they] surface’ (*si affacciano*), following Gerratana’s 1975 edition.

Having declared that 'in the slightest intellectual activity, in "language", there is contained a specific conception of the world,' but that such conceptions are by no means always unitary or internally consistent, Gramsci continues:

When one's conception of the world is not critical and coherent, but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups. The personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the whole world over. To criticise one's own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world. It therefore also means criticism of all previous philosophy, in so far as this has left stratified deposits in popular philosophy. The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset.¹³

13 Gramsci, *Quaderni*, p. 1376; *Selections*, p. 324; *Gramsci Reader*, pp. 325–326. In early editions of the *Selections*, the last sentence quoted was unfortunately missed out, a deplorable mistake which led to dubious 'deconstructionist' readings of the text. The mistake was pointed out by Edward Said in 1978 in his book *Orientalism* and corrected in subsequent editions.

It is clear that what Gramsci means here, and elsewhere, by 'folklore' is what we would now call popular culture. It is also safe to claim that what he said about popular culture then (he was writing in the 1930s, but drew his examples from earlier in the century and back into the 19th) can be applied without too much difficulty to the rather more complex phenomena of popular culture at the end of the 20th century. One may have difficulties, in a 'post-modern' age, with the implicit Hegelianism of some of the formulations: who would be confident, now, that there is a progress of thought and of history to ever more advanced levels of development? But to take as one's 'preliminary point of reference' the idea of individuals as formed by their culture in complex and often incoherent ways, and to make it one's job to make sense of this incoherence, seems to me an intellectual programme of the highest importance – even more important (and difficult) now than at the time Gramsci put it forward.

The centre of this programme, it seems to me, must be a return of history – of historicity – into our understanding of culture and how it is acquired. The so-called 'three-minute culture' is of course no such thing. Everyday life is steeped in history. The problem is that this history is so imperfectly known, that there is, in Gramsci's phrase, no 'inventory' of the past which insistently comes back to haunt us. A case in point would be post-modern architecture, whose 'novelty' consists almost entirely in the eclectic use of historical motifs – motifs, that is, which signify through their evocativeness without

necessarily evoking anything precise. To ask what they evoke, and why, and why this evocativeness is – however bizarrely – often pleasing, we need to work our way back through the tangled thicket of signification, not to a once and for all original meaning, but to a history of meaning, out of which current practices have been generated. The return to history is a return to the repressed.

So it is with film and television. ‘Life’s parade at your fingertips’ (as the salesman calls it in the Ross Hunter/Douglas Sirk film, *All That Heaven Allows* [1956]) throws up a million-and-one images referring to or evoking multiple layers of pastness, but the sense they make is increasingly arbitrary. Many of these images have been seen before, and are known to the viewer. Others are not known in their singularity, but are decoded by reference to those that are known. Moreover, the reference point for the decoding of one image is more and more often another image or piece of information gleaned from television, rather than knowledge acquired from outside. The inventorizing of television (and of film on television) is therefore of the first importance.

The kind of history I am talking about is history seen from the present. It is not therefore history with the pretension of displaying the past, in Ranke’s much quoted phrase, ‘*wie es eigentlich gewesen*’ – the way it really was. There is no way of determining what history ‘really’ was, and even if there were it would not account for the erratic modes in which history pops up in the present. This does not mean that attempting to trace as reliably as possible the parameters of past events is a waste of time. On the contrary, the construction of objective histories – whether histories of facts relating to film production and circulation, of systems of filmic representation, of the sort of events represented in film and other media, or of the circulation of representations via film and television – is as important as ever, if not more so. These histories provide reference points, co-ordinates, without which any attempt at tracing the way things are remembered is doomed to remain incoherent. For this reason, the relatively speaking more correct versions of film history provided in recent books like Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson’s *Classical Hollywood Cinema* are unequivocally welcome for what they are, and should not be criticized for not being what they are not.¹⁴ More than ever we need good histories of cinema, just as we need histories of architecture, or warfare, or sex.

The problem with writing the history of cinema, though, is that histories as generally conceived – histories of the industry, or of technique, or of audiences, even histories of signifying systems – take one only so far. What is needed – and is so hard to supply – is a history of subjectivities. The current vogue for studies of ‘reception’ represents, it seems to me, a vague recognition of the existence of the problem. But it falls some way short of being a solution. There are technical senses in which films and TV

¹⁴ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, and New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); the criticism I have in mind would include the articles by Barry King in *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 6 (1986), pp. 74–88; and *Screen*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1987), pp. 56–82.

15 This perspective is very important to any form of 'historical poetics' which aspires to establish knowledge of the internal parameters of works of art with the same certainty as facts external to the work. See G. Nowell-Smith, 'Facts about films and facts of films', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* vol. 1, no. 3 (1976); and David Bordwell, *Making Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 263–74.

programmes are 'received' by audiences, beginning with the reception of the signal by the TV set (or receiver, as it is technically called), passing through the sets of conditions affecting cognition, and ending up with hypotheses about the processes of cognition themselves. This work is potentially very valuable when applied to history. A history of reception (in a global sense) offers a useful corrective to positionless, 'objectivizing' histories in so far as it signals the gap between understanding the facts from a present standpoint and the way those facts appeared to audiences at the time the films were first seen.¹⁵ But in order to illuminate the presence of film within culture, reception studies need to be supplemented by theories of fantasy on the one hand and of the relation between images and their referents on the other. For although culture can indeed be seen in terms of shared knowledges and agreed practices of cognition, it is also determined by more arcane processes in which a central role is played by fantasy and the devious modes of its binding to the real.

Such theories do of course exist, and *Screen* can claim much credit for pioneering them. But the psychoanalytically informed work of the 70s, with its focus on 'the subject', has proven inflexible and hard to adapt to the task of tracing changing patterns of subjectivity. And yet it is in these changing patterns of subjectivity, and their complex relationship to other patterns of historical change, that the story of the cinema's effectivity lies. To disengage out of the surface of the present a historical dimension and a dimension representing the multiple layering of subjectivity is a daunting task. But it is one which needs to be attempted if we are to make any claim to knowing the century in which we live.

The proletarian woman's film of the 1930s: contending with censorship and entertainment

MARY BETH HARALOVICH

In the 1930s, many Hollywood films positioned women's narrative choices within the fragile contours of a patriarchal capitalism in which the morality of womanhood struggled with economic pressures. Products of the studio system, with stars and production values, these films also called upon a popular recognition of the material conditions which inform women's gendered and class identities. They circulated meanings about: the social and economic restrictions of 'shop girl' wages (*Our Blushing Brides* [MGM, 1930]; *Employees' Entrance* [Warner Bros, 1933]); the terms under which love between the classes is possible (Dorothy Arzner's *Working Girls* [Paramount, 1930]; *A Free Soul* [MGM, 1931]); the economic conditions which foster prostitution (*Faithless* [MGM, 1933]; *Marked Woman* [Warner Bros, 1937]); sexual harassment in the workplace (*Our Blushing Brides*; *Employees' Entrance*; *Big Business Girl* [MGM, 1931]); the social and economic oppression of working-class women (*Baby Face* [Warner Bros, 1933]; *Black Fury* [Warner Bros, 1935]); and, strangely enough, the possibilities of social change through Marxist theory (*Red Salute* [Reliance, 1935]).

A Hollywood proletarian woman's film raises a number of questions about the possibilities for oppositional meanings in the entertainment film. I shall address some of these issues and propose a methodology which derives from the contradictory elements of the genre. Through analysis of two films which cross the 1930s, I shall explore how these films work through contemporary economic

conditions in different ways. While *Our Blushing Brides* (1930) invites women to recognize and identify with the choices available to women in the film, *Marked Woman* (1937) identifies the women in the film as other, addressing the female audience in a position of superior knowledge. The degree to which film censorship is responsible for this shift in the address to women by the proletarian woman's film of the 1930s constitutes a central issue.

In its concern with the economic parameters of woman's social existence, the proletarian woman's film de-centres what Maria LaPlace has concisely summarized as the distinguishing features of the 'woman's film'. While the proletarian woman's film can address 'the traditional realms of women's experience: the familial, the domestic, the romantic', it is also likely to focus on how the economic realities of woman's daily existence modify her presence within these traditional places. In the 'arenas [of] love, emotion and relationships' the proletarian woman learns that economic power informs both romantic and sexual relationships. And, as LaPlace argues, 'A central issue . . . in any investigation of the woman's film is the problematic of female subjectivity, agency and desire in Hollywood cinema'. In the proletarian woman's film, this problematic is firmly tied to the social relations of power which derive from the intersection of gender and economics.¹

Not all films about working women adopt a proletarian consciousness. For example, a film like *Night Nurse* (Warner Bros, 1931) is not a proletarian woman's film. While the female protagonist of *Night Nurse* is a working woman, the problems she confronts are not directly related to the economic conditions of her existence. Further, the film's exploitation of the sexuality of its women characters and stars is poorly motivated by character traits or narrative structure. *Night Nurse* contains many scenes of flagrant maternal drunkenness, violence to women and display of female sexuality. But it does not provide space for the intersection of woman's gendered identity and economic identities. A film like *Night Nurse* functions in this study as a base line against which the proletarian woman's film may be identified.

As Charles Eckert's consideration of *Marked Woman* as a Hollywood proletarian film has shown, any representation of the 'real relations' of social life can only emerge in this context through the conventions of Hollywood cinematic practice.² Whilst the proletarian woman's film uses signifiers of 'working class-ness' (clothing, apartments, speech, gestures) to differentiate class identities and contextualize character traits, the genre also participates in what Eckert has called 'the almost incestuous hegemony that characterized Hollywood's relations with the vast reaches of the American economy by the mid-1930s', namely, the merchandising of lifestyle.³ In pressbooks for the proletarian woman's film, exhibitors are urged to address women audiences

1 Maria LaPlace, 'Producing and consuming the woman's film: discursive struggle in *Now, Voyager*', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is*, (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 139.

2 Charles Eckert, 'The anatomy of a proletarian film: Warner's *Marked Woman*', in *Movies and Methods, Vol. II*, Bill Nichols (ed.), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 407-25.

3 Charles Eckert, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's window', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1978), p. 4.

within similar contradictions. Advertising copy seeks to draw women to the cinema by asking them to recognize the contemporary economic issues in films about women's lives, while merchandising tie-ins and publicity stories hawk the visual pleasure of stars and consumer products. And film industry censors raised concerns about linking the American economy to problems with woman's self-identity.

In 'The politics of the "popular"', Tony Bennett describes popular culture as a 'terrain on which dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural values and ideologies meet and intermingle'. He goes on to argue that 'the very organisation of cultural forms' is shaped by 'these opposing tendencies [and their] contradictory orientations'. In Bennett's view, popular culture easily accommodates contradiction and diversity by providing space for the combination and articulation of multiple social identities. 'Oppositional cultural values create a space within and against [dominant culture] in which contradictory values can echo, reverberate and be heard'.⁴

These assumptions about opposing tendencies and diversity suggest a methodology which can open up analysis of the text/context relationship to explore the possibilities for expression of a proletarian consciousness in Hollywood commercial entertainment. Multiple meanings can collide and coexist within the same text because popular forms are produced by the intersection of oppositional forces. While Bennett does not detail these forces, Annette Kuhn, in a recent study of censorship and power, argues for historical analysis which proceeds from a similar assumption. For Kuhn, power relations (both in the text and in its contexts) are a fluid 'process of negotiation between contending powers, apparatuses and discourses'. Kuhn shows how this assumption effectively de-centres the power of censorship and of power itself, insisting that 'the forces involved in film censorship at any conjuncture are [not] in any way fixed or decisive'.⁵

Four contending forces which combine to produce the proletarian woman's film emerge from these methodological assumptions about the fluid combination of historical forces and the need to explore the opposing tendencies and the specific apparatuses which characterize the Hollywood cinematic institution: first, the address to women through the exploitation of events and/or situations derived from the contemporary social economy of the Depression; second, the narrative and stylistic needs of the film text and the work of the text in organizing meanings; third, the conditions of studio production, especially the 'entertainment value' of star discourses and the related display of production values, merchandising and consumerism; and fourth, censorship, through the development of the Production Code during the 1930s. As these four areas work together to produce the proletarian woman's film, their intersection

4 Tony Bennett, 'The politics of the "popular" and popular culture', in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, (London: Open University Press, 1986), p. 19.

5 Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 131 and 134.

contributes to the production of contradictions and to the potential for resistances to patriarchal ideologies within popular entertainment.

Because this study concentrates on the 1930s, it might be expected that the formalization of the Production Code in 1934 would result in the elimination or the suppression of films which take up social relations of economics and gender. While the degree to which Production Code censorship might have found the proletarian woman's film to be a problem is an important issue, it is just as important to identify the aspects of Hollywood cinematic practice which might subvert censorship concerns. The exploitation of contemporary problems related to women's sexuality calls the ideologies of patriarchal capitalism into question. As the four contending forces are analysed as they operate through specific films, tensions between 'censorship' and 'entertainment values' emerge with some consistency as they work together to allow the production of oppositional values in the Hollywood film.

Recent studies of the possibilities for social consciousness within the entertainment film have shown dissatisfaction with the attempts of popular entertainment to circulate oppositional or contradictory meanings, largely because it is assumed that classical Hollywood narrative is a decisive factor in meaning production. John Hill and Nick Roddick have each written about popular films which seem to recognize the material existence of class relations; and both conclude that classical Hollywood narration subverts any progressive meanings that these films may contain. Roddick's survey of Warner Bros social consciousness films of the 1930s and Hill's analysis of British realist working-class films of the 1950s and 1960s use widely different methodologies to assess the politics of these popular films; yet both writers insist that the ideologies inherent in character, causality and the happy ending serve to personalize social conflict and to offer solutions which deny the complexity of social life.⁶ The very fact of narration, it is suggested, requires the subversion of any socially conscious subject matter. This assumption about the ideological power of classical Hollywood cinema also suggests that narrative structure can unify the heterogeneous subjectivity of audiences and that Hollywood films in the final instance reproduce a dominant ideology.

This was an assumption shared by film censorship, as it operated through the Production Code Administration. Lea Jacobs and Richard Maltby have each analysed a particularly contradictory period in film history, 1930 to 1934, when the Production Code was being negotiated and the ideological value of narrative was in process of being discussed and institutionalized. Both Jacobs and Maltby argue convincingly that the development of the Production Code shows that the institution of Hollywood film censorship identified, and attempted to protect, dominant ideologies. Both

6 John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963* (London: British Film Institute, 1986); Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s* (London: British Film Institute, 1983).

7 Lea Jacobs, 'Censorship and the fallen woman cycle', in *Home is Where the Heart Is*, Christine Gledhill (ed.), pp. 100–12; Richard Maltby, *Baby Face* or How Joe Breen made Barbara Stanwyck atone for causing the Wall Street crash', *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1986), pp. 22–45.

8 Jacobs 'Censorship and the fallen woman cycle', pp. 102–4; Maltby, pp. 44–5.

authors centre their studies on a difficult problem for ideology: the 'sex film' or 'kept woman'/'fallen woman' cycle, in which impoverished or working-class women exchange sexual favours for economic security and for what Jacobs describes as 'class rise'. This research shows that the Production Code Administration regarded narrative structure as a strategy for controlling the production of meaning and for reducing the potential for oppositional subjectivities in contemporary audiences. Both Jacobs and Maltby suggest that the disruptive potential of ideological contradiction around woman's sexuality was understood as a threat to dominant values and capitalist culture. As film censorship developed in the 1930s, the Production Code Administration attended to narration and film style in order to alleviate ideological problems.⁷

In Jacobs's analysis of the conventions of the 'fallen woman' cycle, it is argued that the film industry recognized that the narrative logic of 'class rise', with its visual display of women and material rewards, worked against the morality of womanhood which the Production Code tried to protect. In his analysis of *Baby Face*, Maltby enlarges the context of censorship to include 1920s and 1930s consumerism. In *Baby Face*, Lily and Trenholm give their fortune to the latter's bank, which is on the verge of financial collapse. The film ends with the couple, broke but happy, working in the factory town from which Lily originally escaped. Maltby sees this ending as a narrative 'punishment' for the kept woman, for her 'existence as a spectacle of desire . . . in an economic moment when the possibilities for consumption were sharply restricted'. In Maltby's analysis of the ideological effects of Production Code censorship, the display of consumerism through woman-centred spectacle is regarded as incompatible with capitalism in crisis during the Depression.⁸

However, comparison of two proletarian woman's films which cross the chronology of the 1930s reveals how studio production 'entertainment values' intersect with the exploitation of the Depression in different ways. Rather than being incompatible with capitalist culture, the proletarian woman's film displays the contradictory values surrounding woman's sexuality, the visual pleasures of consumerism and the social economy of the Depression which are well grounded in the opposing tendencies which constitute the film industrial and social context of 1930s cinema. Also, with *Our Blushing Brides* – a pre-Code 'shop girl' film, and *Marked Woman* – a post-Code film about prostitution, potential 'moral difficulties' are understood differently in each instance by the Production Code Administration. This analysis will show, through the four factors which produce the proletarian woman's film, how popular entertainment films, both before and after the 1934 Production Code, are made up of complex and contradictory discourses about the social relations of class and gender; and that

Our Blushing Brides

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1958 Loew's Inc. (Courtesy of
Turner Entertainment Co.)



two significant contending forces in the production of meaning are studio 'entertainment values' and censorship.

The early 1930s 'shop girl' film is especially useful for exploring how popular films accommodate the contradictions of the first years of the Depression. This genre exploited the Depression by exploring the sexual politics of the department store. In drawing narrative conflict from sexual harassment in the workplace, the 'shop girl' film draws upon the economic determinants which tie together relations of class and gender. Yet, whilst showing how economic privation threatens woman's virtue, the 'shop girl' film also fosters consumerism through fashion shows. (Indeed, *Our Blushing Brides* would be thirty minutes shorter were it not for the fashion shows.) This display of merchandise and spectacle contributes to the film's articulation of class difference and the contemporary economic stresses on women.

Our Blushing Brides is the last in a trilogy of popular MGM films about contemporary young women, all of which starred Joan Crawford. These films span the coming of sound and of the Depression. In the first two, *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) and *Our Modern Maidens* (1929), Crawford danced her way through performances as 'wild and reckless' flappers. Released nine months after the Crash, however, *Our Blushing Brides* retained the lavish spectacle and high production values of the first two films of the trilogy, while accommodating the Depression economy through a redesign of the Crawford character from party girl to hard-working 'shop girl'. This allowed MGM's star to make the social transition without leaving behind the glamorous Cedric Gibbons Art Deco sets and modern costumes of the two previous films.⁹ The film centres on the working life of women employed as sales assistants and models for a large department store. Low wages require three women to

9 Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, 1986), pp. 90-91, p. 124; 'Our Dancing Daughters', *Variety*, 10 October 1928, p. 22; 'Our Modern Maidens', *Variety*, 1929

share the rent of a cramped apartment, and they harbour no illusions about any future change in their situation. The owner of the department store is a wealthy and handsome playboy accustomed to satisfying his desires with the women his store employs. In a variation of the 'fallen woman' (in which, as Lea Jacobs notes, the visual display of the woman is dependent upon her fall into materialism¹⁰), the 'shop girl' recognizes the economic nexus of sexual harassment and struggles to reject the temptation of material goods. The 'shop girl' film can afford this virtue, since the visual pleasure of the star's display is partially guaranteed through her role as a department store model. While the lead character has the strength to resist the owner's advances, her co-workers/roommates are more desperate – or more cynical – and allow men to provide them with material comforts in exchange for their virtue. The women discuss how their desires are thwarted by the economic exigencies of waged labour: in this way, the film explores the economic boundaries of women's sexual identities. The 'shop girl' film explains – and justifies – the economic parameters of choice available to working women.

Our Blushing Brides uses three types of narrative space in visually situating the ideological environment in which the women's class and gender identities intersect. First, there is the primary location of narrative action, the department store, a setting which integrates three systems of exchange: work, consumerism and sexuality. The film immediately establishes Crawford's dual identity – as the star but also as an ordinary working woman. The film begins with dozens of women lining up at the time clock to begin the working day. While Crawford strikes a model's pose, she also jockeyes for a place in front of the locker room mirror with the other workers. Once she is on the job, however, *Our Blushing Brides* neatly brings forward the extraordinary qualities of the star and of the studio's production values, an industrial strategy which also informs the representation of class difference in the film. Crawford's roommates, both of whom eventually (but not without struggle) allow themselves to succumb to material temptation, work at boring counter service jobs (selling perfume and blankets).

As the star in the role of department store model, Crawford's work constitutes a multiple site of exchange and looking. Her character takes pleasure in participating in commodity spectacle while modelling fashions she cannot herself afford for women of a different class. The store owner, who surveys the first fashion show in the film with his valued customers, is invested with the power of ownership in all three systems of exchange: labour, consumerism, and sexuality. He owns the model's labour, the lingerie and the gowns they are selling, and – through the eroticism of his gaze – the women's sexuality, which is both waged labour and part of the display of merchandise.



11 'Blushing Brides', *Variety*,
6 August 1930, p. 21.

The second type of narrative space is the living space which makes class differences visible and situates the working women within an economy of widely disparate incomes. There are two types of living space in *Our Blushing Brides*: that of the workers and that of extreme wealth. The three women share a small one-bedroom apartment. Meanwhile, on his grand estate, the store owner lures women into a lavish studio apartment built into the branches of a large tree. (About the display of production values through the tree house, *Variety* commented: 'seldom does Hollywood's lech for bigness lead to such ridiculous extremes'.¹¹) In a charity fashion show at the estate, a shot/reverse shot shows the store models, in simple and ordinary clothes, visually dazzled by the fabulous gowns and sumptuous living environment available to their class opposites.

The third type of narrative space in the 'shop girl' film, and the one which draws relations of class and gender firmly into the arena of narrative conflict, is the space of sexual harassment. It is here that the shop girl confronts her economic dependency on the owner. The semi-clad Crawford is visually caught in the models' dressing room at the store by the gaze and physical presence of the owner. As he intrudes into her space from the doorway, his desire integrates his economic ownership of the store and of her labour with his sexual power.

In this scene, a woman is wedged between the uninvited gaze of a man at the rear of the frame and the camera at the front. She covers herself in protection from his gaze, resisting her forced display, while participating in a visual display for the camera. This scene of sexual harassment in *Our Blushing Brides* is similar to one in *Night Nurse* in which a male resident doctor easily colonizes the space of the nurses' dressing room through gestures and glances. But unlike *Our Blushing Brides*, the aggressive male gaze in *Night Nurse* is not



Our Blushing Brides

motivated by specific character traits or goals. Instead, it suggests a more 'naturalized' assumption about male prerogative and sexual exploitation.

Our Blushing Brides establishes a visual and narrative contrast between a virtuous but dowdy existence on \$12.50 a week on the one hand, and commodity spectacle on the other. While her roommates meet unhappy ends, the Crawford character resists both temptation and sexual harassment. She ends the film wearing the clothes she might have previously modelled, romping with her husband-to-be, the store owner, in his tree house apartment. Unlike the 'fallen woman', the shop girl's virtue is rewarded by marital happiness and 'class rise'.

Our Blushing Brides



¹² JBM Fisher, Resume, 9 June 1930, *Our Blushing Brides* case file, Special Collections, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills; 'Blushing Brides' *Variety*, 6 August 1930

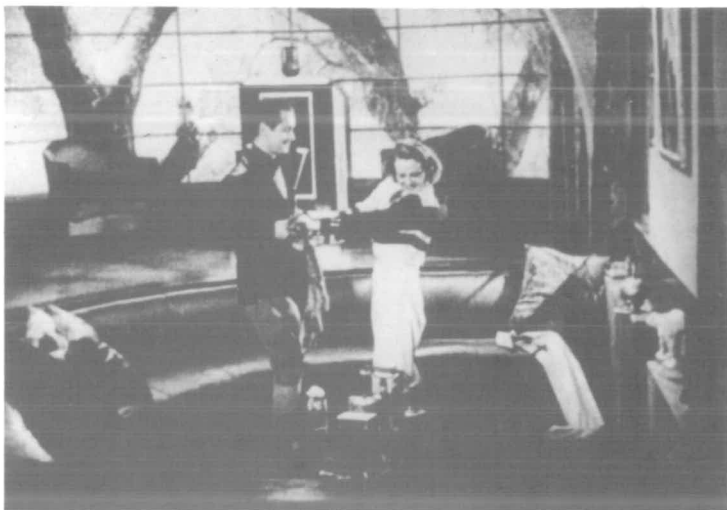
¹³ 'Blushing Brides' *Variety*

Although the Production Code Administration observed that *Our Blushing Brides* was about 'the well-known primrose path', it was also found to be inoffensive in the meanings it offered about sexual politics: the story 'has been very discreetly handled and contains moral values of the highest quality. Beside this it has an abundance of entertainment value. It conforms to the Code and contains nothing objectionable'. *Variety* acknowledged more explicitly that the fantastic narrative resolution of *Our Blushing Brides* met the needs of both ideology and entertainment: 'Miss Crawford in steadfast chastity emerges as the ultimate winner, with the typical fictional accomplishment of a rich husband, without loss of ideals'.¹²

Variety derided this proletarian woman's film as 'Another of Metro's endless cycle of sex, satin and salesgirl hooey designed to capitalize the day dreams of flaps and stenogs'. Yet it also predicted that this combination of entertainment and address to contemporary women would have a 'box office response [which] will indicate both managers and populace [are] satisfied'.¹³ Because records from the very early 1930s are incomplete, in demonstrating further how these films ask contemporary women viewers to recognize their own experiences, desires and 'day dreams' in the lives of their cinematic sisters, it is necessary to look at a later example of a 'shop girl' film.

The advertising campaign for *Employees' Entrance* (1933) exploits the Depression and the lives of department store workers by firmly establishing an address to contemporary women which recognizes sexual harassment in the workplace. Touted as the 'most pressing moral problem of our times', the sexual power of employers results from women's problems in finding work in an economy with scarce employment. The film's advertising campaign asks: 'Has the depression brought BARGAINS IN LOVE? Is there a panic in

Our Blushing Brides



- 14 Pressbook for *Employees' Entrance*. Warner Bros Archives, Special Collections, University of Southern California

- 15 Pressbook for *Marked Woman*. Warner Bros Archives, Special Collections, University of Southern California

morals . . . when millions of heartsick girls will pay *any price* for a job!' A flyer apparently meant for distribution 'To New York working girls – and their bosses!' shows eight scenes from *Employees' Entrance* which establish the workplace as the site of women's sexual exploitation. Released in 1933, on the cusp of the Code, many of these scenes were excised from the film through censorship negotiations. Yet the address to the gendered and class identities of contemporary working women was clear: 'Department store girls – this is your picture – about your lives and your problems'.¹⁴

It is interesting to compare the address to women of *Employees' Entrance* with that of the later *Marked Woman* (1937). One poster typical of the campaign for this film reads: 'Women! You've read about those notorious "clip joints"! You've heard how men are robbed by their hostesses! You've passed such places many times without knowing it! Now you can see a side of life you've never known!' The poster copy goes on to promise an exposé of 'racket slaves' and an opportunity to 'Meet the Girls who got caught in the racket!'¹⁵ In considering *Marked Woman*, a proletarian woman's film made after the inauguration of the 1934 Production Code, a central issue must be the degree to which film censorship, as opposed to the three other factors – narration, studio production, and the articulation of the relationship of economics to gender identities in contemporary life – marks the film. *Marked Woman* is a realist exploitation of contemporary conditions which intersect gender and economics, based on the well-known and sensational 1936 trial of Lucky Luciano for gangsterism and prostitution. Like *Our Blushing Brides*, *Marked Woman* accommodates a star discourse with the concomitant demands of glamour and merchandising.

One effect of this combination of star, censorship and articulation of women's choices through gangsterism and vice is a shift in address to women viewers. Rather than positioning women characters as sharing experiences with women, as the 'shop girl' films do, *Marked Woman* separates the women in the film from the women in the audience. The 'you' of the sexually-harassed department store worker has become the 'she' of the hostess/prostitute. This shift in address results from the historical context of *Marked Woman*.

In taking up prostitution and Lucky Luciano, the film of necessity established causal relationships between the economic conditions which foster prostitution and the sexual and economic exploitation of gangsterism. At the same time, Production Code censorship required that this knowledge be somehow hidden or adequately repressed. Even the 'entertainment value' generated by star and merchandising constituted a problem. In her return to the screen after a year's absence during her public contact dispute with Warner Bros, Bette Davis had to be repositioned, as star and actress, in a tough role. The film's pressbook shows how the studio deftly handled the wide range of knowledges in circulation around this film, managing to its advantage, but not suppressing, the film's contemporary realist basis.

In 'The anatomy of a proletarian film: Warner's *Marked Woman*', Charles Eckert discusses how the film represents gangsterism and vice as capitalist practices of ownership and exchange of labour. Accounts of prostitution in the press of 1936 also show that specific knowledge about the economic exploitation of prostitution and about the economic causes of prostitution was widely circulated. *The Nation*, for example, stated: 'It is clear that in the vast majority of cases women have embraced the world's oldest profession because they knew no other way to make a living . . .'. *Time* presented short case studies of the operation of prostitution syndicates. And *New Republic* published a list of people who lived off prostitutes' labour, and summarized a report by the Florence Crittenton League on the histories of 561 delinquent and wayward girls, concluding: 'despite all moral indignation, prostitution is a comparatively advantageous profession – for a few years. It is the best job these girls can get'.¹⁶

Despite this circulation of public knowledge about prostitution, censorship required that in the film itself any specific reference to prostitution or to the Luciano case be suppressed: ' . . . it is imperative that you establish it quite clearly that the girls, Mary, Emmy Lou, *et al.*, are merely hostesses in a night club and not, by any stretch of the imagination, prostitutes'. Yet, as the review in the *New York Times* shows, it required no stretch of the imagination to know not only that *Marked Woman* was about prostitution and Lucky Luciano, but also that film censorship required that such knowledge be repressed:

16 Eckert, 'The anatomy of a proletarian film', pp. 422-3; 'Prostitution in New York City', *The Nation*, 22 April 1936, p. 369; 'Women: bawdy business', *Time*, 25 May 1936, p. 15; 'New York's vice ring', *New Republic*, 10 June 1936, pp. 124-6. I am grateful to Diane Waldman for sharing these sources with me.

In the interests of the Hays office and the Legion of Decency, the sphere of influence of Johnny Vanning, the picture's Luciano, has been transferred from the bagnio to the bistro, and it is the hostess in the smart clip-joint, rather than the members of the older [sic] profession, who engage our attention.

Thus, while the Production Code Administration might have succeeded in eliminating explicit references to prostitution and the New York vice case, the film's narrative nevertheless retained the knowledge about the economic and sexual exploitation of prostitution.¹⁷

A second contemporary discourse is that of the star system. Bette Davis was assigned to *Marked Woman* after her return from England, having failed in her attempt to wrest control of her career from Warner Bros by freeing herself from the studio's seven-year option contract. Maria LaPlace argues that discussions about this lawsuit in the popular press circulated a conception of Davis as possessing 'qualities of strength, independence and devotion to career'. As LaPlace has shown in her analysis of *Now, Voyager* (Warner Bros, 1942), expectations about Davis inform the way the film's advertising 'exploit[s] spectator knowledge of [Davis's] previous roles and personal life as major marketing tools'.¹⁸ While a similar strategy is adopted for *Marked Woman*, in this case the star must negotiate some potentially bumpy ground. Davis's return to the screen is in a genre whose lead character is typically played by a tough male. In its presentation of Davis's role as a hostess who turns against her racketeer boss, the pressbook stresses the 'versatility' of the actress and the 'emotionality' of her performance style. In a role which can exhibit her award-winning 'diversified emotional acting', Davis must be 'alternately tender, hard and gay, and versatile actress that she is, she does them all admirably'.¹⁹

In a letter to Jack Warner following the New York premiere of *Marked Woman*, Charles Einfield (director of publicity and advertising in New York) reassured Warner about Davis's financial value to the studio. Einfield's comments also indicate that performance has the ability to smooth the gaps between realist portrayals and expectations of star glamour. Einfield reported:

[Women at the Strand Theatre in New York] don't talk about how beautiful she is, but how realistic she is. You hear women say, 'There's a gal who doesn't need a lot of junk all over her face and who doesn't have to put on the glamour to hold us in our seats. . . . She isn't afraid to let people see her as the tawdry character she is supposed to represent'. . . . Bette Davis is a female Cagney and if we give her the right parts, we are going to have a star that will pay off the interest on the bonds every year.²⁰

17 Joseph Breen, letter to Jack Warner, 1 December 1936, *Marked Woman* case file, Special Collections, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills; Frank S. Nugent, 'Marked Woman', *New York Times*, 12 April 1937, p. 16.

18 LaPlace, 'Producing and consuming the woman's film', pp. 148 and 150.

19 Pressbook for *Marked Woman*.

20 S. Charles Einfield, letter to Jack Warner, 12 April 1937; Rudy Behlmer (ed.), *Inside Warner Brothers (1935-1951)* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), p. 39.

The advertising and publicity copy offered to exhibitors in the *Marked Woman* pressbook takes a position similar to Einfield's. The pressbook acknowledges both opposing tendencies which combine to produce *Marked Woman*: the film's exploitation of censorable material (gangsterism, violence and prostitution) and the entertainment value of its star discourse and merchandising.

The pressbook begins with statements which remind exhibitors that Warner Bros is offering two proven profitable commodities: Bette Davis and gangster films. These two elements, already 'pre-sold' to the public, are linked together: first, 'Bette's Back' on the screen; and, second, she is starring in one of the studio's popular gangster/social consciousness films:

PRE-SOLD IN HEADLINES[:] The most acclaimed star of 1936, after an absence of nearly a year, returns to make a film that is ACCLAIMED BY CRITICS in the trade press and by Hollywood correspondents as worthy of standing beside 'Public Enemy', 'G-Men' and other Warner Bros films of special social significance.

The pressbook goes on to reassure exhibitors that studio-produced advertising can handle any potential problems with the film. In offering the exhibitor 'carefully prepared advertising copy and subtly written publicity stories', the pressbook implicitly admits that censorship did not hide the 'true' content of the film. It also cautions exhibitors not to design their own 'stunts' around the 'theme of the plot' or the title.²¹

Several devices for exploiting the film's realist basis implicitly require audiences to recognize the film's unspoken subject matter:

Brutal realism of picture calls for a warning sign in lobby front for faint hearted. Copy for sign can be taken right out of ad copy – 'WE WARN YOU! Don't Come Unless You Really Want to Know Life, Excitement, Adventure! And If You Want to Know The Truth About The Other Side Of Life – Run, Don't Walk, To This Theatre.

For a radio phone-in programme, the pressbook suggests a problem-solving context in which 'a girl . . . tells the predicament of one of the girls in the picture. Listeners get ducats for the best solution to the girls' problem.' And, in another approach which acknowledges the film's 'true' topics, Warner Bros adopts a reformist stance about the studio's contribution to the public interest. The pressbook offers the following copy for a one-minute radio plug:

Motivated by the conviction that truth is more powerful than any fiction, Warner Bros has taken up the cudgel against a racket which is preying on American Society and have made a daring expose of the 'clip joint' menace. Fearlessly flinging this

²¹ Pressbook for *Marked Woman*.

challenging gauntlet in the face of the American apathy, Warner Bros brings 'Marked Woman' to [a theater near you].²²

Publicity stories about the film's production enhance both aspects of *Marked Woman*: its 'hard-hitting realism' and the glamour and spectacle of its production values. Two stories appear to address Production Code Administration concerns about 'excessive brutality and gruesomeness' in the depiction of Mary's beating and of Vanning slapping Betty. In 'Bette's Mother Fooled By Hard Make-up on Star', Mrs Davis is reported as not recognizing her daughter through the bandages 'expertly applied by [a] Hollywood surgeon' and the bruises provided by the make-up department. In a story subtitled 'Newcomer To Movies, Taking Heavy Clip, Thinks That's The Usual Thing', the slap which causes Betty to tumble down the stairs to her death is described as unintentionally realistic, the result of the awkward physical meeting of the two actors, Jane Bryant and Eduardo Cianelli.²³

The way the pressbook foregrounds women's gowns reveals how star and merchandising provide a discourse which competes with those around gangsterism and prostitution. The women's costumes, used to demonstrate the economic and sexual exploitation of the women by the gangsters, also demonstrate studio production values and the star system as they are offered as fashions and spectacle to the female spectator. As LaPlace suggests in her analysis of *Now, Voyager*, the conjunction of star-character-actress-consumer-woman is the site of multiple and contradictory consumerist discourses. In *Marked Woman*, the 'Morn to Midnight Fashions as Worn by Bette Davis' in her private life – 'arising', 'off for the day's work at the studio', 'for tea' and 'dressed for a gala evening' – exactly reverse the work schedule of the women in the film, who, like the women in the song 'Lullaby of Broadway', say goodnight early in the morning when the milkman's on his way.²⁴

Finally, a story about how 'Film Backgrounds Help Indicate Human Traits' explains how the 'tastefully done' Club Intime was changed into the Club Intimate to assist in 'building the character of the villain of the piece'. Vanning's goals and desires also effected changes in the women's costumes; but unlike the club mise-en-scene, the gowns are elided as signifiers of 'clip joint' as they are routed through the spectacle of merchandising and the star discourse of the film. The story relates that Vanning 'also turns the hostesses into high-powered chisellers with new manners, morals and above all, clothes. So Orry-Kelly . . . was able to get in some choice bits of his own art, including an evening gown for Miss Davis which he declares is the most beautiful he has ever produced'.²⁵

This analysis of the *Marked Woman* pressbook shows that Production Code censorship prohibitions do not work in isolation in repressing the economic conditions taken up in the film. Rather,

²³ Joseph Breen, letter to Jack Warner, 22 December 1936, *Marked Woman* case file; Pressbook for *Marked Woman*.

²⁴ LaPlace, 'Producing and consuming the woman's film', see especially pp. 145 and 150; Pressbook for *Marked Woman*.

²⁵ Pressbook for *Marked Woman*.

censorship works in concert with other conditions of Hollywood film production, notably the star system and merchandising, to displace concerns about any morally difficult meanings circulating through the film. And, while discourses of star and merchandising may compete with knowledge about the economic determinants of sexual exploitation, they do not simply erase the intersection of economics and gender at the basis of *Marked Woman*: 'It's better than being a salesgirl'.

In his exploration of the potential for progressive meanings in popular culture, Tony Bennett asks historians to re-code the signifiers of the past in order to see how they might produce oppositional meanings and political effects.²⁶ In its representation of capitalist culture in the 1930s, the proletarian woman's film exploits the economic context of the Depression as the basis for its narrative conflict. As women characters confront the moral choices available to them, they must also recognize how economics intersect with gender. This knowledge about sexual politics is expressed through the film industry imperatives of censorship, the star system, and the display of production values and merchandising. The gender identities which emerge in this fluid combination of narration, censorship, studio production and appropriation of contemporary problems are necessarily mobile, shifting and contradictory.

²⁶ Tony Bennett, 'Hegemony, ideology, pleasure: Blackpool', in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, p. 152.

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***The King of Kings* and the Czar of All the Rushes: the propriety of the Christ story.**

RICHARD MALTBY

Let those who tell us to uplift our art invest money in the production of a history play of the life of Christ. They will find that this cannot be staged without incurring the wrath of a certain part of our people.

D.W. Griffith, 1916.¹

¹ Quoted in Henry Stephen Gordon, 'The Story of David Wark Griffith', *Photoplay* 10 (October 1916), in Harry M. Geduld (ed.) *Focus on D.W. Griffith*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 42.

In his autobiography, Father Daniel Lord, the Roman Catholic advisor on *The King of Kings* (deMille, 1927) tells of an occasion on which he was watching, as he put it, 'some retakes of the Resurrection', with the Protestant minister advising on the film, Reverend George Reid Andrews.

As we walked from the set, blinded by the fierce lights that flooded the figure of Christ as the stone rolled away from the tomb, the minister said to me, 'How consoling that must be to those who accept the Resurrection literally.' I think I blinked, but not with the strain of the lights. 'I take it literally,' I answered with as little emphasis as possible. 'You do?' he said very much surprised. 'Indeed I do,' I replied, and he changed the subject.²

² Father Daniel A. Lord, S.J., *Played By Ear* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956), p. 263.

Lord's anecdote captures an intention, implicit in any Hollywood product but particularly in one as expensive as *The King of Kings*, to please all of the people all of the time. Commercially, the film

The King of Kings

(Courtesy of B.F.I. stills archive)



- 3 Birchard, working from deMille's records, quotes a production cost of approximately \$1,265,283 Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B DeMille, Program Notes For a Three-Part Film Retrospective* (American Museum of the Moving Image, New York, January/August 1989). Quoted in Piero Spila and Vito Zagarno, *Il Più Grande Spettacolo del Mondo Cecil B DeMille, la Paramount, la formazione di Hollywood Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema Rassegna Internazionale Retrospectiva* (Home Di Giacomo Editore, 1989), p. 139

- 4 Charles Higham, *Cecil B DeMille* (New York Dell, 1973), p. 134

had to be a non-sectarian biography of Jesus. The advertised cost of its production was \$2.3 million; according to Robert S. Birchard the actual figure was closer to \$1.3 million.³ To commit such sums to a film version of the life of Christ, it was necessary to ensure that it was acceptable both to 'those who accept the Resurrection literally' and to those who did not.

In his 'uncensored' biography of deMille, Charles Higham relates an incident that captures the distance between the project's intention and its achievement. (If this story is not true, it ought to be.) After *The King of Kings* had been released, deMille received a telegram from John C. Flinn, supervising the distribution of the film for Pathé in New York, demanding that Barrett Kiesling be fired as head of publicity for the film. Kiesling had released a press statement saying that the film 'had certainly done something to encourage the enmity of the leaders of the many denominational faiths'. When confronted by deMille, Kiesling was mortified and protested that the statement should have read '... to encourage the comity of the leaders of the many denominational faiths.' DeMille fired him anyway.⁴

The history of the cinematic apparatus must at times be written in terms of its relation to other ideological apparatuses and institutions. This article has little concern for aesthetics, and only a restricted interest in the thematic discourse of *The King of Kings*, to the extent that it typifies aspects of Protestant belief in the 1920s. My principal preoccupation is with the institutional context in which the film was produced, and the ways in which its production attempted

to serve an institutional project: to establish a close and mutually supportive relationship between the liberal Protestant churches and the motion picture industry through the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. (MPPDA). That institutional project failed, with uncomfortable consequences for the industry.

As an organization, the MPPDA dealt in the public relations activity of ensuring that the 'organized industry' came as close as possible to its rhetorical goal of 'pleasing all of the people all of the time'. But as an institutional strategy, this positive rhetorical objective became inverted, negative: to displease as few people as little and as seldom as possible.⁵

The MPPDA dealt primarily with organizations rather than individuals; it was much more sensitive to organized complaint than it was to that of a dissatisfied individual. In the case of *The King of Kings*, organized interest groups were more numerous and more clearly defined than on most occasions, and the differences among them – denominational disagreements over doctrine – were more substantial and less easily resolved.

Why would anyone spend \$1.3 million filming the life of Christ in 1926? Disregarding any of deMille's purely personal intentions in the project, about which there is little reliable evidence, there were a number of sound commercial reasons for the venture. There had been at least thirty-nine earlier versions of the Christ story, of which the most commercially notable was probably Kalem's *From the Manger to the Cross* of 1912.⁶ Biblical epics, including deMille's *Ten Commandments* and MGM's *Ben Hur*, had taken large grosses over the previous three production seasons. Perhaps as relevant as these considerations was the substantial interest on the part of American churches of all denominations in using the appeal of motion pictures to their own ends. One 1923 estimate suggested that as many as 15,000 church schools and clubs were showing motion pictures as part of their work.⁷ By 1927 the MPPDA estimated that there were 27,000 schools, churches, and other institutions equipped with projection machines, and while this non-theatrical sector hardly represented a major market in revenue terms, the head of the MPPDA's Department of Public Relations noted that

. . . distributing companies, while they may disclaim it, appear to be anxious to secure the slight additional revenue resulting from the practice of renting to churches, pictures which are more or less current.⁸

More important, perhaps, than the financial rewards for addressing the educational and religious markets were the institutional incentives in promoting the industry's public relations with groups often acutely sensitive to both the moral dangers of the screen and

5 For other accounts of this process, see Lea Jacobs, 'Industry Self-Regulation and the Problem of Textual Determination', *The Velvet Light Trap* 23 (Spring 1989), pp. 4–15; and Richard Maltby, 'Baby Face, or How Joe Broen Made Barbara Stanwyck Atone for Causing the Wall Street Crash', *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 2 (March–April 1986), pp. 22–45.

6 Richard H. Campbell and Michael R. Pitts, *The Bible in Film: A Checklist, 1897–1930* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1981).

7 'The Church at Work', *Homiletic Review* 85 (March 1923), p. 205. Quoted in Rolf Lunden, *Business and Religion in the American 1920s* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 74.

8 Jason Joy to Will Hays, July 14, 1926. Public Relations File, Motion Picture Association of America Archive, New York. [Subsequently MPAA].

Publicity meeting
(Courtesy of B.F.I. stills archive)



the extent to which it competed with them for the attention of the nation's youth. In a variety of ways, including the production of 'worthy' pictures intended to appeal to the network of local Better Films Committees it had established, the MPPDA encouraged its member companies to service these markets and cater to the interest groups they represented. In return, they gained the cautious endorsement of some, at least, among the clergy. In a published sermon on 'The Attitude of the Christian Toward Motion Pictures', the Reverend C.L. Collins, of Florida, argued,

If Christian people always absent themselves from the picture theatre, the management is left with none but the baser element of the community for his patronage and he must cater to them or go out of business. It seems to me, therefore, that the moral and Christian people hold the question of better or poorer pictures very largely in their own hands . . . We can help create and foster a virile public sentiment that will demand good pictures and none other . . . we should boost and boost hard whenever a notably good screen production comes along . . . if we want the motion picture business turned over to the devil, lock, stock, and barrel, let Christian people boycott it. But our boycott would not put the motion picture out of business. Such action on our part would simply compel all connected with the industry to make pictures to suit people of low morals or of no morals at all. Just as the Church, long ago, began to make use of the best in music for the glory of God, so would I have us make use of the best of the art of the motion picture for the glory of God and the good of man.⁹

⁹ Quoted by Lamar Trotts, 'The Bible in Motion Pictures', typescript of article, no publication reference 1925. Trotts, L. - Special Articles file, MPAA

The King of Kings



A big-budget version of the Christ story seemed to be an ideal instrument of the MPPDA's strategy.

If deMille was looking for further commercial inspiration for the project, it was most obviously available in the success of *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus* by Bruce Barton, which retold the story of Christ as 'the story of the founder of modern business'.¹⁰ Published in 1925, it became the best-selling non-fiction book of 1926, selling 250,000 copies in eighteen months.¹¹ One of the leading figures in the advertising industry, and also an extremely successful journalist, Barton put Jesus in the company of Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, and other American 'success stories' in the Horatio Alger mode:

You who read these pages have your own creed concerning him; I have mine. Let us forget all creed for the time being, and take the story just as the simple narratives give it . . . Stripped of all dogma this is the grandest achievement story of all!¹²

Barton was one of several 'religious' consultants employed on *The King of Kings*, and deMille's thought followed Barton's quite closely:

I wanted simply to take the four Gospels and tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth, as He appeared to those around Him, a figure no less human than divine . . .

But deMille also acknowledged that the director of *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920), *Male and Female* (1919) and *The Affairs of Anatol* (1921) might seem an odd choice for such a project.

¹⁰ Bruce Barton, 'How it Came to be Written', *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1924).

¹¹ Roderick Nash, *The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1970), p. 148.

¹² Barton, p. 9.

I knew there would be in the audience religious people fearful of how a subject dear and sacred to them would be treated, and people who were sceptics and had come to scoff, and people who were cynics and had come to witness deMille's disaster. I decided to jolt them all out of their preconceptions with an opening scene that none of them would be expecting: a lavish party in the luxurious home of a woman of Magdala . . .¹³

13 Donald Hayne (ed.), *The Autobiography of Cecil B. deMille* (London: W.H. Allen, 1960), pp. 245, 252.

If deMille's theological sense was in accord with Barton's neo-Humanist Protestantism, his sense of religion as spectacle chimed more closely with the religious pageants staged by Father Lord's Sodality movement, or perhaps even more closely with the 'religious vaudeville'¹⁴ of Aimee Semple McPherson, 'the world's most pulchritudinous evangelist',¹⁵ as she was billed.

14 Nash, pp. 150-2.

15 Carey McWilliams, 'Aimee Semple McPherson: "Sunlight in My Soul",' in Isabel Leighton (ed.), *The Aspirin Age 1919-1941* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), p. 55.

Over 5,000 people jammed the Angelus Temple [in Los Angeles] every evening for Aimee's service . . . Orchestras and choruses thundered out a variety of secular as well as sacred music. Sermons were often animated, . . . In 'Throw Out the Life Line!' a dozen nightgowned maidens, clinging to the Rock of Ages amidst crashing thunder and flashing lightning, were pulled across the stage to safety by sailors of the Lord.¹⁶

16 Nash, pp. 150-2.

Once I saw her stage a memorable dramatization of the triumph of Good over Evil. On the stage was an illuminated scoreboard. As the lights dimmed in the auditorium, one could see the forces of Good advancing on the citadels of Evil, stalking up ravines, scaling mountains, jumping precipices. To the flash of godly gunfire and the blaze of holy artillery, the forces of General Evil began to retreat. Then a miniature blimp came floating over the scoreboard terrain. A soldier of Good fired a single shot, exploded the blimp, and an ugly grimacing Devil landed on the stage with a thud as the spotlight centred on an unfurled American flag.¹⁷

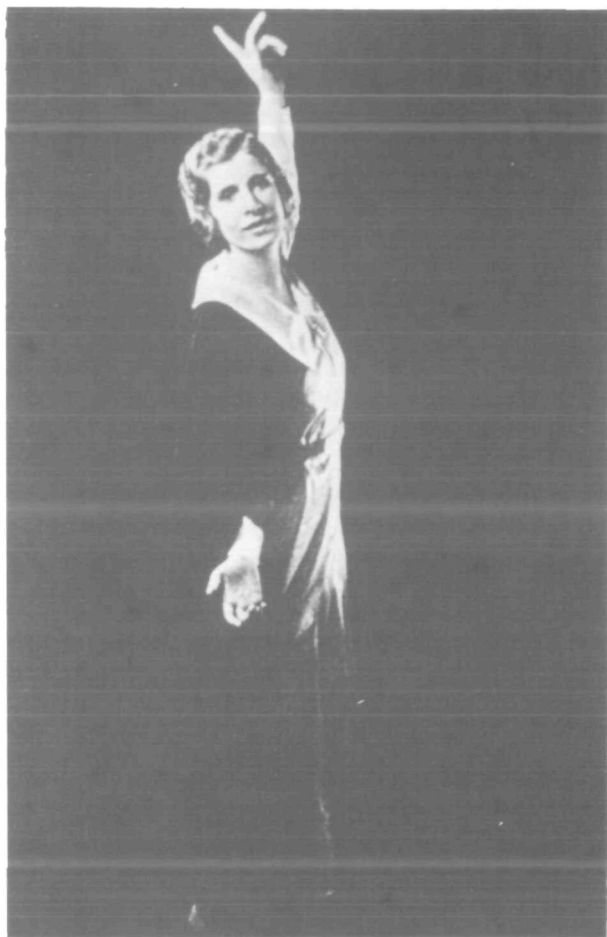
17 McWilliams, pp. 59-60.

Carey McWilliams described her as suggesting 'sex without being sexually attractive . . . But wherever she moved or stirred, sex was present, at least in its public aspects, its gross implications; sex in headlines, sex emblazoned in marquee lights'.¹⁸ She disappeared in May 1926, presumed drowned, and reappeared a month later, claiming to have been kidnapped. The revelations that she had spent the intervening weeks in a 'love nest' with a married radio operator filled the tabloid press from September 1926 to January 1927, during the production of *The King of Kings*, when it was rivalled in newsworthiness only by the Hall-Mills trial, in which the wife of an Episcopalian minister was accused of the murder of her husband and his lover. Both were scandals to rival Hollywood's best.

18 McWilliams, p. 51.

In its combination of spectacle, sexual scandal and religion, in its version of the Magdalen, Aimee Semple McPherson's performative

Aimee Semple McPherson
(Courtesy of the American
History Slide Collection)



style was in the same register as Hollywood's; she was called, among other things, 'the Mary Pickford of revivalism', and she gave her followers what Roderick Nash called

... the best of both worlds – a simple, hopeful, authoritarian faith and 'whoopie' salted with just the right amount of sex ... They thrived on news of Aimee's risqué personal life and at the same time joined her in deploring jazz age morality. Piety served as whitewash. Aimee put sex and spectacle in a safe container where people who did not quite dare to be modern could enjoy them. ... She rose to popularity on the wings of public ambivalence.¹⁹

¹⁹ Nash, p. 152

She identified her audience quite specifically. 'I bring spiritual consolation to the middle class', she declared, 'leaving those above to themselves and those below to the Salvation Army'.²⁰ And her

²⁰ Nash, pp. 149–150

Four Square Gospel was, as she readily acknowledged, firmly fundamentalist.

McPherson, like evangelists from Dwight Moody to Billy Sunday before her, applied the techniques of mass culture to revivalism and borrowed, or perhaps parodied, the styles of Hollywood far more effectively than did the liberal Protestantism it was in opposition to. But if their style echoed deMille, the inflexibility of fundamentalist doctrine made it inappropriate as the basis for a necessarily non-sectarian film version of the life of Christ to be marketed at an undifferentiated audience. The problem with which the film had to deal was ensuring that the forces of organized American religion remained friendly to it so that it could successfully combine the interests of religious sincerity and business.

The film's doctrinal starting point was the religious doctrine of American cultural hegemony: an interdenominational, broadly liberal Protestantism. This situation was most immediately dictated by the principal commercial inspiration behind the project, Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows* – the Book of the Film – and also because the institutional encouragement to make the film came from the 'organized industry's' relations with organized liberal Protestantism. Beyond these considerations, for a project with Hollywood's conventional rhetorical goals there was an element of commercial inevitability in the choice of the least doctrinally specific or demanding version of Christianity.

In liberal Protestantism's adaptation to its crises of modernism, T.J. Jackson Lears argues that

The crucial moral change was the beginning of a shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial toward a therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world – a world characterized by an almost obsessive concern with psychic and physical health defined in sweeping terms. . . . This was a pattern typical in the expression of therapeutic ideals: clouds of religiosity obscured a growing preoccupation with worldly well-being.²¹

By contrast to the fundamentalism of such as McPherson, liberal Protestantism had a more intimate relation with capitalism to negotiate, as 'business' seemed in the process of superseding Christianity as the nation's established religion. When John D. Rockefeller Jr. justified the scale of his contribution to the building of Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick's monumental Riverside Church in New York, he did so by saying he did not want the business world to look down on the churches.²²

Fosdick, the most influential liberal Protestant moralist of the 1920s, argued that 'religion and life have been drifting apart', and that as a result, 'multitudes of people are living not bad but frittered

21 T.J. Jackson Lears, 'From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880–1930', in Richard Wightman Fox & T.J. Jackson Lears (eds.), *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 4, 13.

22 Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919–1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 31.

lives – split, scattered, uncoordinated'. For this, he blamed the 'endless unreality and hypocrisy' of an excessively formalistic Christianity, and sought instead an 'intelligently defensible' faith that 'will furnish an inward spiritual dynamic for radiant and triumphant living', and 'contribute to man's abundant life'. As Lears suggests, along with other religious spokesmen of the period, Fosdick unwittingly contributed to the decline of liberal Protestant Christianity by transforming it 'into a form of abundance therapy'.²³ In the process it became thinner, more 'weightless'.²⁴ As a system of beliefs, it seemed to require relatively little attention from its followers. One of the institutional paradoxes of liberal Protestantism was that while the value of church property doubled between 1916 and 1926, there continued to be steady decline in the vitality of religious belief. There was no decrease in church membership during the period, but there was a decrease in church attendance, since people saw less reason for visiting the church they belonged to. If most Protestants maintained their theoretical belief in Christian doctrines, the practices of their lives reflected the spreading secularization of American culture. In 1929 the Lynds reported that in Middletown,

Secular marriages are increasing, divorce is increasing, wives of both workers and business men would appear to stress loyalty to the church less than did their mothers in training their children, church attendance is apparently less regular than in 1890, Rotary which boasts that it includes all the leaders of the city will admit no minister, social activities are much less centered in the churches . . . In theory, religious beliefs dominate all other activities in Middletown; actually, large regions of Middletown's life appear uncontrolled by them.²⁵

Offering a therapeutic message of humanist and ecumenical values hardly different from the secular values of business as service, the churches found themselves in competition for moral leadership with their corporate sponsors. Economist Roger W. Babson described the church as 'the greatest industry in the world today', while ministers were encouraged to develop their 'salesmanship', and the practice of religion was widely located within a dominant business discourse.²⁶ The circumscribed role of Christianity in this culture was exactly caught in the ambiguous terminology of a St. Louis 'Business Bible Class':

Taking the Bible all the way through, there are plenty of passages which have a direct bearing upon business today, and if these passages are studied and applied they will be found to be practical business sense. They will make for success in business – looking at the question from the material side only – and they will certainly make business a better and cleaner thing for all of us who are in it.²⁷

²³ Lears, 'From Salvation to Self-Realization,' pp. 13–14.
²⁴ Lears derives the idea of the decline of Christianity in the late nineteenth century producing a condition of 'weightlessness' from Nietzsche. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p. 41.

²⁵ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), p. 406.

²⁶ Lundén, pp. 58, 65.

²⁷ *The Christian Herald*, 46 (March 31, 1923), p. 265. Quoted in Lundén, p. 63.

In the public imagination of Elbert H. Gary of US Steel or Theodore Vail of AT&T corporate business enterprise was coextensive with the public interest, and assumed responsibility for the welfare of society. The material prosperity brought by business offered a social salvation less troubling or contentious than the Social Gospel. Enmeshed as they were in the material and ideological infrastructure of capitalism, it was hardly surprising that the Protestant Churches should have been so affected by the business ethic of the 1920s. In search of relevance, many ministers adapted business values to their own organization and activities. There was preached in the land a Gospel of efficiency, and ministers were urged to adapt to the times by such slogans as 'Early to bed, early to rise/Preach the gospel and advertise'.²⁸ Clergymen endorsed business statesmen and spokesmen and offered them their pulpits and periodicals. Fosdick offered Owen D. Young of General Electric the pulpit of the Riverside Church to deliver an address on 'What is Right in Business'.²⁹ Business spokesmen like Barton responded by endorsing ministerial programmes of efficiency and service, and the application of business ideas to church work. In the mid-1920s, one of the new major metropolitan churches, like Fosdick's or Rev. Christian F. Reisner's Broadway Temple in New York City – the first skyscraper church³⁰ – might have a real estate value of \$15m and annual budgets of \$500,000.³¹ Such organizations, complete with meeting house, gymnasium, clinic and kindergarten began indeed to resemble a business devoted to social service, and more and more frequently business expertise was called in to give managerial advice. Some of the larger churches had business managers; others hired efficiency experts to reorganize them. Divinity schools offered courses in business administration for pastors, who could also take out a subscription to the journal, *Church Management*, or buy advice books such as *How to Make the Church Go*.

Achievement was no longer measured in spiritual terms but in the size and number of salaries, budgets, members, and church buildings . . . partly because church authorities thereby hoped to reach the unchurched and partly because these activities gave the church the appearance of being a dynamic and necessary force in society.³²

As one of the critics of this behaviour, the Presbyterian president of Union Theological Seminary Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin put it, some ministers of the large churches had 'ceased to be shepherds and had become ranchers'.³³

Many of them also became part-time exhibitors, and one of them, Thomas F. Opie, proselytized that he had found 'the solution [to] the perplexing problem of attendance upon the almost deserted second service'. He insisted, however, that it was necessary both to

²⁸ Miller, p. 22.

²⁹ Lundén, p. 36.

³⁰ Lundén, p. 80.

³¹ Miller, p. 31.

³² Lundén, pp. 58, 70.

³³ Miller, p. 25.

use recent commercial films and to have projection standards 'comparable to those of the best moving picture palaces'. He suggested that feature-length films were most suitable, preceded by 'a short service of singing, Bible reading and prayer, taking preferably only fifteen or twenty minutes'.

A silver offering, taken after the 'sermon in pictures' should partially if not entirely cover the cost of rental and carriage. . . . Most of the Bible films that have come to our attention . . . have lacked sufficient dramatic action and freshness of content to make an equal appeal to such films, say as *The Fool*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Servant in the House*, *The Man Who Played God*, *The New Disciple*, *The Ancient Mariner*. . . . The picture services are held only on alternate Sundays, so that persons not enthusiastic over this form of worship may not be entirely debarred from evening service and so that the church's prescribed worship shall not be abandoned.³⁴

One church in Rockport, Massachusetts reported that its Sunday evening congregation had increased from 12 to 500 when it began using films in its services,³⁵ and the tactic was particularly effective in those states and cities which still enforced Sunday blue laws, closing places of amusement on the Sabbath. Small independent exhibitors frequently protested the major companies' servicing of what they regarded as unfair competition. Other protesters, who objected to a

. . . general tendency to resort to popular lectures, moving pictures, Rotarian methods, church suppers, wild advertising . . . cartoonists, whistlers, comedians, enormous signs at the church porch, dwarfs, Indians, Negro Jubilee singers, freaks of all sorts, free ginger ale, services conducted exclusively by children, and a thousand other Chautauqua devices, in the hope of drawing a crowd,³⁶

were met by arguments that the church could not afford to neglect modern business methods: 'If cigarets, breakfast foods, life insurance, and motor-cars are susceptible of successful advertising campaigns, why not the greatest thing in the world – religion?'³⁷

*

The Man Nobody Knows was a typical expression of this dominant discourse. Barton took his version of liberal Protestantism even further down the road to non-denominationalism. As a journalist, he had written laudatory articles on both Billy Sunday and Harry Emerson Fosdick: the fundamentalist-modernist divide concerned him less than their willingness to apply modern business techniques to their activity. Barton's own sense of what was necessary to believe was minimal: his readers could accept or reject miracles

³⁴ Thomas F. Opie, 'How We Use Motion Pictures: Some Suggestions for Parishes', *The Churchman*, 139: 3 (January 19, 1929), p. 15.

³⁵ Lundén, p. 74.

³⁶ Herbert Parrish, 'The Break-Up of Protestantism', *Atlantic Monthly*, 139, (March 1927), p. 301. Quoted in Lundén, p. 58.

³⁷ 'Selling Religion', *The Literary Digest* 70 (August 20, 1921), pp. 28–9; quoted in Lundén, p. 76.

38 Barton, p. 65.

39 Barton, p. 16.

40 Barton, p. 179.

41 Barton, 'How it Came to be Written'.

'according to the make-up of our minds',³⁸ and he saw no need to regard Satan as any more than 'an impersonalization [sic] of an inner experience. The temptation is more real without him, more akin to our own trials and doubts'.³⁹ Throughout the book, Barton's emphasis was on the humanity of Jesus, not his divinity. Above all he sought to demonstrate the mutual relevance of corporate business and a secularized, liberal Protestant Christianity, whose conjoined ideals saw business as service and all business as 'my Father's business'.

Great progress will be made in the world when we rid ourselves of the idea that there is a difference between *work* and *religious work*. . . . All work is worship; all useful service prayer. And whoever works wholeheartedly at any worthy calling is a co-worker with the almighty in the great enterprise which He has initiated but which He can never finish without the help of men.⁴⁰

In seeking to adapt his Christianity to his business environment, Barton constructed a version of Jesus against which he was rebelling: a sentimental, sacrificial Jesus, a weakling, a killjoy, that he claimed to be the Sunday school image of his childhood:

. . . a pale young man with flabby forearms and a sad expression . . . Something for girls – sissified. Jesus was also 'meek and lowly,' a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' He went around for three years telling people not to do things.

. . . A physical weakling! Where did they get that idea? Jesus pushed a plane and swung an adze; he was a successful carpenter; he slept outdoors and spent his days walking around his favorite lake. His muscles were so strong that when he drove the money-changers out, nobody dared to oppose him!

A kill-joy! He was the most popular dinner-guest in Jerusalem. . . . A failure! He picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world.⁴¹

Barton saw the parables as ideal advertisements; his muscular, sun-tanned Jesus was a middle class advertising executive, an industrial statesman, who

. . . personified personal magnetism and outdoor living . . . a master self-promoter who created 'big stories' by healing the sick and provoking controversy . . . This was not merely a businessman's Jesus, but a Jesus fashioned to meet widespread longings for 'more abundant life' and a revitalized sense of selfhood. . . . Far from debasing Jesus into a businessman, Barton sought to transform businessmen into ministers of Christ. . . . The new corporate system was not secular but divine; that was

⁴² Lears, 'From Salvation to Self-Realization', pp. 33-7. Other useful analyses of Barton and *The Man Nobody Knows* are Leo P. Ribuffo, 'Jesus Christ as Business Statesman: Bruce Barton and the Selling of Corporate Capitalism', *American Quarterly*, 33 (Summer 1981), pp. 206-31; and Warren Susman, 'Culture Heroes: Ford, Barton, Ruth', in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 122-49.

⁴³ Lundén, pp. 103-4.

⁴⁴ Lundén, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Don C. Prentiss, *Ford Products and their Sale: A Manual for Ford Salesmen and Dealers in Six Books* (Detroit, 1923), book 5, p. 581. Quoted in Sigmund Diamond, *The Reputation of the American Businessman* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 138.

Barton's message. . . . Spiritualizing the corporate system, he provided a theology for a secular age'.⁴²

This vision was far from being Barton's alone. Ministers such as Fosdick centred their belief in a reconstructed, therapeutic version of the New Testament, exalted Jesus as a healthy personality and made the practical connections to business. In 1923 Charles F. Stockton and William W. Totheroh published *The Business Man of Syria*, an account of Jesus as the 'world's most successful man of business', written for 'downcast business men' and omitting the crucifixion and resurrection as merely personal experiences and therefore of minor interest.⁴³ Harold Bell Wright's 1927 novel *God and the Groceryman* features a group of businessmen under the direction of an industrialist correcting the mistakes that ministers and laymen have made and restoring an interdenominational unity to the churches of the town and harmony to the community.⁴⁴ In a manual called *Ford Products and their Sale*, Ford salesmen and dealers were offered this uplifting anecdote:

One spokesman, who had attended a meeting of executives which had opened with 'one of the most basic prayers' he had ever heard, asked if it were standard procedure in that company to begin its deliberations with prayer. 'Why, yes,' the head of the company replied, 'and more than that, we never even have a directors' meeting but what there stands at one end of the table a vacant chair, and never do any of us make a decision or cast a vote but what we first think of the man of long ago were He sitting there, and say to ourselves, "What would He have done?" I don't know . . . just what such things have meant for us. We are not religious, but somehow or other we always seem to be going ahead.' If the head of the company did not 'know, . . . just what such things have meant' his interviewer did: 'So far as I know that firm has never had a strike, labor trouble, financial trouble, or any of those business disturbing things.'⁴⁵

The Jesus of *The King of Kings* is a figure derived out of the sensibility of *The Man Nobody Knows*, and thus deMille's involvement in the project became, unexpectedly, appropriate to Barton's consumer Christian ideal. Like its source, *The King of Kings* was both textually and institutionally an object in a process of negotiation and accommodation between two elements of a dominant ideology in flux: a declining liberal Protestantism in search of a renewed sense of demonstrable relevance and an emerging therapeutic culture of consumption that had already assumed economic dominance but was still in the process of engineering, testing and fine-tuning its ideological superstructure. DeMille, as much as Barton, was an appropriate figure for such a project. Jack

The King of Kings



Moreland (William Boyd), the 'two-fisted' clergyman hero of his 1925 film *The Road to Yesterday*, is a cinematic example of the minister as salesman, making 'deals' with Ken Paulton (Joseph Schildkraut, who played Judas in *The King of Kings*) over his talking 'to this Fellow I work for'. At the film's climax religious belief is demonstrated to be literally therapeutic, when Ken's invalid arm is cured sufficiently for him to rescue his wife.

The textual evidence of Barton's influence is clear. In his autobiography, deMille observed,

All my life I have wondered how many people have been turned away from Christianity by the effeminate, sanctimonious, machine-made Christ of second-rate so-called art, which used to be thought good enough for Sunday schools. This Man of Nazareth was a man, with a body hard enough to stand forty days of fasting and long journeys on foot and nights of sleepless prayer, a man with a mind sharp as a razor and balanced as a precision scale.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ DeMille, p. 253

His description of the 'note of admiration in the proud official voice of Pilate when he said of Him: "Behold the Man"' is also borrowed in both its sentiment and its language from Barton – although Barton tends to write shorter sentences. Elsewhere, deMille reports that

It was H.B. Warner who suggested to me how the scene [in which Christ drives the money-changers out of the Temple] should have been played. He simply picked up a leather thong and wrapped one end of it around his hand, but with such authority that it was

The King of Kings



47 DeMille, p. 254.

entirely believable when the money-changers fled in confusion from a Christ whose anger was the most terrible because so perfectly controlled.⁴⁷

If so, Warner was remembering Barton's description of the scene quite closely:

The young man had picked up a handful of cords from the pavement and half unconsciously now was braiding them into a whip, watching the whole scene silently. And suddenly, without a word of warning, he strode to the table where the fat money-changer sat, and hurled it violently across the court. . . . There was, in his eyes, a flaming moral purpose; and greed and oppression have always shrivelled before such fire. But with the majesty of his glance there was something else which counted powerfully in his favor. As his right arm rose and fell, striking its blows with that little whip, the sleeve dropped back to reveal muscles hard as iron. No one who watched him in action had any doubt that he was fully capable of taking care of himself. No flabby priest or money-changer cared to try conclusions with that arm.⁴⁸

48 Barton, pp. 34, 37

But beyond these textual allusions, hardly surprising given Barton's employment on the project, the non-denominationalism of Barton's biography provided not only the most immediately fashionable account of Christianity but also the emptiest, the one least likely to contain anything offensive, however offensive religious conservatives might find its omissions. Lears observes that,

Rejecting the 'weightlessness' of liberal Protestant sentimentality,

49 Lears, 'From Salvation to Self-Realization', p. 31.

50 'Report on Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings*, submitted by Daniel A. Lord, S.J. to the National Catholic Welfare Council', n.d. (November, 1926); from Folder, 'DeMille, *King of Kings*', Daniel A. Lord, S.J. papers, Jesuit Missouri Province Archive, St. Louis.

51 'Report *The King of Kings*'. Folder, 'DeMille, *King of Kings*', Lord papers.

52 Lord to Rev John J. Burke, C.S.P., National Catholic Welfare Council, n.d. (March, 1927). Folder, 'DeMille, *King of Kings*', Lord papers.

53 DeMille, p. 256.

yearning for a more vigorous and manly religion, Barton produced a creed even more vacuous than its predecessor.⁴⁹

But that vacuousness provided close to the ideal basis for deMille's project. It needed only a little refinement to remove any existing irritating dogmatic impurities. The Catholic advisor on the project, Father Daniel Lord, reported in November 1926 that he had succeeded in persuading deMille to omit references to specifically Protestant text, in the Lord's prayer, for instance. In his opinion, deMille 'is anxious to conciliate, to see to it that the picture offends no-one, and feels that it will fail of its purpose unless it achieves this'.⁵⁰ A later report, after he had seen the final edited version, similarly endorsed the film. His only anxiety was over the opening Mary Magdalen scene (about which he reported deMille had observed, 'This one scene is C.B. deMille, the rest is the Evangelists.'⁵¹) which he said had now been cut from 2,000 to 500 feet:

It is not at all certain that it will be used at all, but Mr. deMille argues that a beautiful color sequence, with gorgeous costumes, a spirit of opposition to Christ, a building up of conflict, will catch the unbelieving spectator who comes to scoff. . . . There is absolutely nothing objectionable in it now that my cuts have been made except possibly Mary Magdalen's costume. But I have got him to eliminate all close-ups of her, to eliminate scenes where she moves about, and have left just a minimum necessary for the story. . . . There is really a great deal at stake. If this picture is approved and succeeds, it may be the beginning of a real awakening of interest in religious pictures. If it is not approved, the producers will have a handle to say that we urge constructive work and then fail to help it when done. If it is not a success, it will probably end religious picture making for a long, long, time.⁵²

The intended ecumenism of the project was probably most graphically demonstrated by the service with which deMille inaugurated shooting, 'participated in by representatives of the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, and Moslem faiths'.⁵³ In its thematic project, *The King of Kings* as a text must be counted as close to a complete success in producing as anodyne a version of the Christ story, and one as free from doctrinal impurities, as possible. Presumably, that accounts for its durability as a religious text for Sunday school and missionary use. Unfortunately, at the time of its release, it did not prove anodyne enough.

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Will Hays
(Courtesy of B.F.I. stills archive)

54 Will Hays to Albert Warner
September 5, 1922; 1922 Civic
Committee File, MPA.

55 Will H. Hays, *The Memoirs of
Will H. Hays* (Garden City, New
York: Doubleday, 1955), pp.
559-68

Under the leadership of Will H. Hays, President of the MPPDA, the film industry sought the moral endorsement of a wide spectrum of organizations. By mid-1922, within six months of the founding of the MPPDA, Hays had developed a strategy to contain the threat posed to the industry by the lobbying power of nationally federated civic, religious and educational organizations. The aim was to 'make this important portion of public opinion a friendly rather than a hostile critic of pictures',⁵⁴ and the strategy was the same one the MPPDA would consistently employ: to provide previewing facilities for representatives of participating organizations, and financial assistance in distributing their lists and reviews of recommended films. This policy was essentially a containment exercise: cooperating organizations gave publicity to the movies they approved, and made private complaint through the MPPDA about those of which they disapproved. Hays had a cogent explanation of how such a system would produce greater benefits than public criticism. That explanation relied on and contributed to the mythology of Hollywood as 'alien'. Audiences, he argued, had to be educated to want 'better movies', and producers in Hollywood had to be educated to recognize this demand. Repeatedly this was couched in the language of the industry maturing, 'growing up', and in the process moving away from its initial 'alien' influences in production to come under the sway of those among whom, as Hays was inclined to put it, there was 'little difference of opinion between what is fundamentally right and what is fundamentally wrong'. But the mythology of alien standards in Hollywood was necessary to Hays as an explanation for mistakes or slips. Hollywood and its producers had to remain the scapegoat villains of this scenario, always being represented as unable or unwilling, without some form of compulsion, to recognize that decency was in their own best interests.

The MPPDA sought to project Hays himself as a business statesman in the image of Gary, Vail, or Young. They constantly employed the rhetoric of business as service: Hays's organization of a \$15 million pension fund for ministers of the Presbyterian Church was held up as an instance of him doing his 'Father's business',⁵⁵ and as part of the MPPDA's claim to cultural respectability on behalf of the motion picture industry. Another aspect of that claim to respectability was in the MPPDA's stance as an innovative trade association, aggressively pursuing policies of industrial self-regulation not merely in issues of film content but in matters of arbitration and in its relations with the Federal Trade Commission. Hays actively sought to project the MPPDA as being at the forefront of corporate organizational development, and its public relations policy, in its scale and in its apparent openness was one part of that overall project.

Ideally, the MPPDA sought cooperation with large national

organizations which had local branches operating under a centralized and hierarchical structure: the Catholic Church, in the shape of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, was an ideal example. The problem with the Protestant Churches was that they were far less hierarchically organized, and, overall, relations with the Protestant Churches were perhaps the most problematic of all the MPPDA's external contacts. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCCCA) was a loose umbrella organization for Protestant denominations founded in 1908. Its social policies were broadly liberal, to the extent that it frequently came under attack from business groups as well as conservative and fundamentalist clergy. Although the FCCCA did not include the Episcopal Church among its members, and often adopted social and, indeed, theological, policies to the left of a position that the MPPDA might comfortably endorse, it was effectively the only broad national Protestant body with which the MPPDA could deal. In 1922 it had commissioned a report generally favourable to the industry. Although the report had been written before the MPPDA came into being, and therefore was not influenced by them, they had made sure that the report was widely distributed. However, the majority of the industry's sternest and most vocal critics were members of the Protestant clergy – notably the Rev. Wilbur F. Crafts, Superintendent of the International Reform Bureau, and Canon William Shafe Chase, Rector of one of the largest Episcopalian churches in Brooklyn and President of the New York Civic League. There was thus a constant and public discussion of the Protestant churches' attitude to motion pictures, to a much greater extent than in either Catholic or Jewish groups, and the lack of a hierarchically organized Protestant body to which the MPPDA could address itself meant that its attempts at communication were always susceptible to disruption or distortion by disaffected members of the Protestant clergy.

The MPPDA pursued two kinds of positive policies towards church interests in regard to film content. One was a policy of endorsement and cooperation. In March 1923, it established a Committee on Religious Pictures, whose brief was 'to inform the motion picture industry of the needs of the churches in this respect and to acquaint the churches with the problems involved in meeting this demand'.⁵⁶ From early on in the exercise, much of this campaign was directed towards the project of educating the tastes of the audience. Hays's argument to his civic groups was that the producers would respond to audience demand, and that therefore, if they could create a sufficient demand for screen adaptations of literary classics, inspirational biographical and historical pictures – for example, *The Covered Wagon* (1923), D.W. Griffith's *America* (1924), *Old Ironsides* (1926) – the companies would produce them. This diverted onto the Committee an economic responsibility for the success of such pictures. The *King of Kings* project fell firmly into

⁵⁶ Minutes, Executive Committee of the Committee on Public Relations, MPPDA, March 10, 1923. 1923 Civic Committee File, MPAA.

Cecil B. deMille and Will Hays,
Lasky's studios, 1924.
(Courtesy of B.F.I. stills archive)



this category. Many of the letters sent out to civic groups during its roadshow exhibition contained this paragraph:

The producers of the picture were led to make the picture by their faith that *the solid, substantial men and women of the world* would support their efforts. A large sum of money was invested in that faith because this picture, of course, had to be accurate as well as beautiful. And so, quite naturally as well as quite frankly, the motion picture industry is watching us to see how we respond to the picture. The sincerity of our demand for the best pictures will be judged largely by our actions in connection with *The King of Kings*. We've got to show them, therefore, that we are sincere. We've got to make *The King of Kings* worthwhile.⁵⁷

The other aspect of MPPDA policy was to aid in the production of pictures specifically for church use, through the Religious Motion Picture Foundation, formed in October 1925 to produce and distribute 'special religious motion pictures based on Biblical themes and on the historical facts of religion for use in the churches in connection with the sermons and religious services now prevailing',⁵⁸ with George Reid Andrews, chairman of the Religious and Educational Committee of the FCCCA, as its general manager. Early in the life of this organization, Andrews had the idea of making a film version of the life of Christ. Initially, the project involved raising production funds from church sources outside the industry, with the intention that profits would then accrue to the Foundation and to the Protestant churches. Andrews was, in effect, claiming proprietary rights over the life of Christ, or at least over a cinematic version of it. Moreover, he appears to have thought that

57 e.g. Mrs. Newton D. Chapman, Chairman, Committee on Better Films, National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, to 'Better Films Chairmen of DAR Chapters in and near Philadelphia', September 26, 1927 1927, Production Distribution File, MPPA.

58 Lamar Trotti, 'The Attitude of the Church toward Motion Pictures', typescript of article, no publication reference, 6 1925 Trotti, L. Special Articles File, MPPA.

⁵⁹ Hays lists a variety of terms by which he was identified, and suggests that the popularity of 'Czar' was 'due to the fact that a single column of type has room for only four of the largest size used'. Hays, p. 329.

⁶⁰ *The Public Relations of the Motion Picture Industry: A Report by the Department of Research and Education, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York: 1931), p. 147.

⁶¹ Press release to Protestant newspapers, March 23, 1926. 1926 Federal Council of Churches File, MPAA.

⁶² Andrews to Hays, June 14, 1926. 1932 Pathé, *King of Kings* File, MPAA.

Will Hays was in a position to give them to him. As President of the MPPDA, Hays worked like any other trade association leader largely through persuasion and pressure. But the public, and in particular the concerned public, had been led to believe that Hays had extensive and autocratic powers to ban people or pictures from the screen, and that he was, as he was regularly described, 'The Czar of All the Rushes'. Neither Hays nor the MPPDA actively denied these claims, although they never endorsed them.⁵⁹ However, when Hays declared, as he frequently did, that the industry 'stands at attention' to do the bidding of civic groups, many, like Andrews, took him at his word.⁶⁰ Certainly Andrews, a liberal, business-oriented Protestant minister, seems to have seen in a big-budget motion picture life of Christ the chance to do some of his 'Father's business'.

The plan to fund production from church sources was abandoned fairly early in the Foundation's life, and during 1925 and 1926 Andrews discussed the project with D.W. Griffith, Famous Players, and with First National, who went as far as to invest about \$20,000 in story rights to Giovanni Papini's recent international bestseller, *The Story of Christ* (1921; tr. 1923). He later claimed that these projects had been delayed at Hays's request until after the release of *Ben Hur* (1926). In early 1926 the FCCCA were the prime movers behind the establishment of the Church and Drama Association, intended to be an interdenominational body to promote 'the worthy things in the stage and screen and to educate the public to the appreciation for the best that the drama has to offer'.⁶¹ It again had Andrews as its chairman. DeMille's production plans were announced to the press in June, although there seems to have been some uncertainty as to whether he was planning a life of Jesus or Judas. This announcement led Andrews to write to Hays,

You know my interest in the subject these many months and the difficulties we have faced in getting the picture made. The last conversation I had with you on the subject you said to me that no picture dealing with the life of Jesus would be made by one of your companies without a full and satisfactory understanding and settlement with us; that you considered, so far as your companies were concerned, that we had preempted [sic] the field. . . . I am not asking for a monopoly of the subject but I am asking for what seems to me to be reasonable consideration in the matter.

Andrews understood 'reasonable consideration' to mean that the other companies agree not to pursue their projects, and that he be employed as a consultant. Further, he wanted the FCCCA to have a power of final veto over the script, and he also demanded 'that ten per cent of the gross receipts of the picture be paid into the treasury of our Church and Drama Association'.⁶² Hays was not in a position to do any such negotiating on deMille's behalf, nor was it likely that

any production company would agree to any project on such terms. However, the MPPDA did put Andrews in contact with deMille, who employed him as one of three clerical religious advisors. He was involved in script preparation during July and August 1926; later the MPPDA claimed that he was the only advisor paid a salary.

Shooting on the film began in September 1926 and was completed on January 17, 1927. The period between then and the film's release probably represented the high point of collaboration between the MPPDA and the Protestant churches. The MPPDA's publicity on the film stressed its ecumenical nature, listing ministers who had visited the production, and noting that 'From the beginning, ministers of all denominations have been consulted'.⁶³ Andrews, however, was claiming the leading role in their publicity, timing a membership campaign for the Church and Drama Association to coincide with prepublicity for the release of *The King of Kings*.

The picture was premiered on the evening of Good Friday, April 15, 1927, at the Gaiety Theatre, New York,⁶⁴ and collected a body of suitably reverential reviews, several of which commented on the awed silence with which the film was received by its first night audience.⁶⁵ In June, 1927, Reverend S. Parkes Cadman, President of the FCCCA, wrote to Hays, endorsing

... the deeply reverent and religious character of the motion picture *The King of Kings* and the great service it will undoubtedly render to the cause of Christ and to all humanity ... The Committee regards the outcome as a notable demonstration of what may be accomplished when the religious and dramatic forces cooperate in a spirit of understanding and appreciation ... it wishes to encourage the production of pictures which inspire and instruct while they entertain. My associate, the Rev. George Reid Andrews, has informed me of your quiet but effective aid in securing this fine production.⁶⁶

There are, however, clear indications that the film was not a box office success. Despite deMille's claim that 'probably more people have been told the story of Jesus of Nazareth through *The King of Kings* than through any other single work, except the Bible itself', it probably did little better than break even on its initial release. Birchard suggests that the film grossed \$2.6 million, a figure which would barely put it into profit, even assuming that these earnings occurred entirely during its roadshow and first general release.⁶⁷ Higham claims that the Los Angeles premiere was a disaster, partly due to a 2½ hour-long Prologue staged by Sid Graumann to mark the opening of his Chinese Theatre.⁶⁸ It was exhibited in a fifteen reel version in four roadshow prints for the remainder of 1927, and there is some evidence to suggest that the various special showings of the film to women's clubs, religious groups and school children were

⁶³ *The Motion Picture*, vol. 3, no. 2 (February 1927), p. 6.

⁶⁴ *The Motion Picture*, vol. 3, no. 3 (March 1927), p. 3.

⁶⁵ *The Motion Picture*, vol. 3, no. 4 (April 1927), p. 6.

⁶⁶ S. Parkes Cadman to Will Hays, June 10, 1927. 1927 Production-Distribution File, MPPA.

⁶⁷ DeMille, p. 258. Birchard, quoted in Spila and Zagarrio, p. 139.

⁶⁸ Higham, pp. 137-8.

⁶⁹ Memoranda by Jason S. Joy, May 20, May 21, 1927, and letter, Carl Milliken to Joy, August 20, 1927, in *The King of Kings* File, Production Code Administration Archive, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

⁷⁰ DeMille, p. 252.

⁷¹ *The Motion Picture*, vol. 3 no. 4 (April 1927), p. 6.

designed to raise publicity for the film's lagging box office.⁶⁹ It may be that the film's exhibition pattern was affected by competition from sound pictures or by a dispute between deMille and Pathé; deMille was unhappy about the merger of the two companies, and detached himself from the new company as quickly as he could. It may simply have been that the pessimistic predictions about its audience appeal turned out to be correct. At any rate, it seems unlikely that *The King of Kings* was a clear financial success, which puts in a somewhat different light the claim in deMille's autobiography that both he and Jeremiah Millbank, who financed the production, gave their profits from the film to charity.⁷⁰ Institutionally as important as this was the fact that the prognostications made by both Andrews and Lord about the fate of future religious filmmaking should *The King of Kings* not be successful seem to have come about, and this is perhaps the clearest evidence of the film's lack of financial success. Only one film based on a Biblical story, Warner Bros.' *Noah's Ark* (1929), which was in production at the same time as *The King of Kings*, was released by a major company over the next eight years, until RKO's *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1935. Had *The King of Kings* demonstrated the existence of a market, it would certainly have been imitated.

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For the MPPDA, however, the institutional crisis over the film was only just beginning. There had been a Jewish advisor, Rabbi J.M. Alkow of California, on the project, but Lord, certainly, claims that he was not much in evidence. When it opened, the film received at least one favourable review from a Jewish source. Rabbi Alexander Lyons, editor of 'The Supplement', commented,

I regard *The King of Kings* as one of the most impressive pictures I have ever witnessed. It is reverent, instructive and inspiring. I commend it for Jew as well as for Christian. It should make the Jew most nobly and proudly Jewish, the Christian more emulous of the character of Jesus. I forecast a great success, spiritually and materially, for the enterprise.⁷¹

But in October, an increasing number of Jewish protests began to cause serious concern. When confronted with this criticism, deMille was not conciliatory. On October 13, he wrote to Hays, saying that he had been told by a representative of B'Nai B'Rith that

the picture should never have been made at all but that, having been made, it should be corrected so as not to give the impression that the Jews had anything to do with the crucifixion of Jesus.

He reported that he had re-edited the sequence with Pilate, on which most objection had been concentrated. He had determined

that it was necessary to leave in at least one title reading 'crucify Him', and he had offered the representative the choice of having the line spoken by Caiaphas the High Priest or by ruffians in the crowd. Neither seemed to be acceptable, at which point deMille's attitude hardened, and he informed the Rabbi with whom he was negotiating that

I felt they would greatly harm the Jewish race by bringing the matter to the point of an open fight. I further stated to him that I did not want to be forced to put in the title, 'his blood be upon us, and upon our children's children', nor any of the other titles that appear in the Gospels that might in any way be harmful to the Jews. . . . You can see from all of the above that someone in the Jewish race is trying to start trouble. This trouble should be stopped immediately for the good of all, as it could very easily lead to a situation that might be very destructive. Those Jews who are raising these rather violent objections would crucify Christ a second time if they had an opportunity, as they are so ready to crucify what, for want of a better term, I shall call His second coming upon the screen.

He advised Hays to negotiate with Andrews to 'see if certain prominent Jews with whom you may both be in contact cannot be made to see that an open attack upon the picture would turn many millions of friends against the Jews, and that a surreptitious attack would place us in the position of having to defend ourselves and the picture as best we could'.⁷²

The MPPDA's tone was much more conciliatory, and its intent was to reach agreement with a committee of B'Nai B'Rith on appropriate eliminations and changes, and make them quietly, without calling attention to what Carl Milliken, the MPPDA's Secretary in charge of its Public Relations Department, described as 'this delicate matter'. Despite the fact that the Anti-Defamation League were demanding that the film be withdrawn from circulation, and that the Rabbinical Assembly of America were calling for 'all Christian bodies engaged in the effort of promoting goodwill between Jews and Christians, to use their efforts toward the withdrawal of the film', Milliken even hoped to use the occasion as an opportunity to establish a permanent liaison with the organization

*You realize that in the instance at present under consideration no offense was intended and our observation is that nothing offensive is noted by the great majority of those who see the picture. Yet we recognize the fact that some members of your race including persons of high standing and broad culture while disapproving of the picture as a whole do in fact find certain incidents and titles especially offensive.*⁷³

This was a situation that might have been anticipated, since

⁷² DeMille to Hays, October 13, 1927. 1927 Production Distribution File, MPAA.

⁷³ Milliken to Senator Alfred M. Cohen, President of B'Nai B'Rith, November 22 1927. 1927 Production Distribution File, MPAA.

74 *Variety*, April 7, 1916.

according to *Variety*, D.W. Griffith had encountered exactly the same problem with B'Nai B'Rith over the Christ story in *Intolerance*. He was reported as having burned the negative of the scene and reshot the sequence, showing Roman soldiers carrying out the crucifixion.⁷⁴

The attempt to keep the issue quiet failed in early December, when prominent liberal Rabbi Stephen Wise publicly denounced the film while negotiations between the MPPDA and B'Nai B'Rith were still going on. An agreed list of changes and eliminations was, nevertheless, finally arrived at in late December. These involved the addition of an introductory title, substantial changes to the Pilate scene, the addition of titles attributing sole responsibility for the crucifixion to Caiaphas, and considerable toning down of details in the scourging and crucifixion scenes. All these changes were agreed to by John C. Flinn, and made immediately in the roadshow prints. Flinn also agreed that the film would not be distributed abroad in 'those areas (particularly Poland, Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia and Roumania) where race hatred might be engendered'.⁷⁵ On December 23, Flinn wrote to deMille that

75 Milliken to Hays, December 14, 1927. 1927 Production Distribution File, MPAA.

The picture must be cut later to a proper length for motion picture theatre exhibition, and in reediting for that purpose [we] can take into account incorporating any of the suggestions herewith with great difficulty.⁷⁶

76 Flinn to deMille, December 23, 1927. 1927 Production Distribution File, MPAA.

The recommended alterations are visible in the 11-reel theatrical print most commonly seen by contemporary audiences. But the project had clearly been sullied by the accusations of anti-Semitism, a charge that was peculiarly difficult for the industry to deal with, attacked as it itself frequently was by anti-Semites.

Both the MPPDA and the FCCCA, through the Church and Drama Association, had made heavy investments in the picture. Its lack of success led to recriminations, particularly between the two principal negotiators, Milliken and Andrews. Throughout 1927 they discussed the relationship between the MPPDA and the Church and Drama Association, but their negotiations foundered on two issues. One was the Association's reviewing policy. The MPPDA wanted it to review films on a monthly basis, producing a list of recommended pictures in the same way as the National Catholic Welfare Council did, and circulating that information to 10,000 Protestant Churches. Andrews' scheme involved recommending only one picture, together with one Broadway play, per month, which Milliken argued cast undeserved aspersions on the majority of the industry's product. Andrews repeatedly tried to use this industry demand as a bargaining counter to gain increased financial support for the Association, to a level that Milliken, wary of having the Association appear to be a creature of the MPPDA, felt was excessive. By March 1928, with the unexpected public relations failure of *The*

King of Kings, their negotiations reached stalemate, and the MPPDA began casting around for other ways to organize the Protestant churches. By September, the relationship with Andrews had turned into one of increasing hostility, with Andrews taking the attitude that

You seem to feel that our only mission is to give publicity to the picture when produced. We have thought of ourselves as something much more than the publicity agents of the motion pictures. . . . We are much more concerned in the great moral principles involved in the production of pictures and it was our understanding that we were to have some influential part in determining the content of pictures before produced.⁷⁷

It was this line of argument that Andrews succeeded in persuading some of the liberal Protestant press to take up in 1929. In particular, the Episcopal journal, *The Churchman*, began a campaign against the MPPDA in June 1929 that combined a vigorous critique of the industry's business practices with a vitriolic personal attack against Hays and Milliken. Within a year this line of attack, against the industry's business methods and the MPPDA's techniques for recruiting the support of influential public opinion groups rather than against film content, had been adopted by much of the Protestant religious press, including the widely circulated liberal *Christian Century*. As a result of this attack the FCCCA commissioned an investigation into the public relations of the motion picture industry, which reported in 1931. The report indicted the MPPDA's methods of recruiting support by what looked suspiciously like payments to lobbyists. It concluded that,

It may . . . be argued that the chief significance of the facts here disclosed is in calling attention to the vague and indefinite ethics of the business community.⁷⁸

In the aftermath of the 1929 Crash, as the liberal Protestant churches had to redefine the position they had taken towards business in the 1920s, the motion picture industry provided them with an available, highly conspicuous target for criticism. Beginning with the disputes with Andrews over the Church and Drama Association, the elaborate system for controlling the expression of public opinion which Hays and the MPPDA had tried to construct during the 1920s unravelled between 1929 and 1933, and came apart piece by piece. The institutional failure of *The King of Kings* was an important part of that unravelling; the MPPDA did not regain the confidence of the FCCCA or of liberal Protestant opinion, and in the early 1930s it had to turn to other sources of support, most visibly to the Roman Catholic Church.⁷⁹ Had *The King of Kings* been successful in promoting an undifferentiated liberal Christianity to an undifferentiated mass audience, had it managed institutionally

77 Andrews to Milliken, October 4, 1928. 1928 Church and Drama Association File, MPAA.

78 *The Public Relations of the Motion Picture Industry*, p. 148.

79 For an account of the relationship between MPPDA and the Catholic Church in the early 1930s, see Richard Maltby, "'Grief in the Limelight': Al Capone, Howard Hughes, the Hays Code and the Politics of the Unstable Text", in James Combs (ed.), *Films and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

to 'please all of the people all of the time', the events of the next seven years – at least as far as the history of Hollywood and censorship was concerned – might have looked very different.

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reports and debates

The British Film Institute: re-tooling the culture industry

JOHN CAUGHIE AND SIMON FRITH

If we in Britain are indeed experiencing the last days of Thatcherism in its present form, we are also feeling the sting in its tail. And if, at the time of writing, the Conservative Government is indeed trailing in opinion polls by the largest margin since 1971, it is exactly because many of those who have been benefiting, whether they liked it or not, from supply-side economics are now beginning to feel the water rising round their ankles. This applies to institutions as much as to individuals. The benefits have not simply been measured in terms of 'popular capitalism', nor is the sting now confined to poll tax and interest rates. Those of us, for instance, who work in film, television, media or communications, whether teaching or producing, have found ourselves the sometimes unwitting beneficiaries of many of the 'performance indicators' of Thatcherism – low overheads, flexible structures, good productivity, resilient demand, job creation – and have occasionally been able to play the system. Now, however, official approval is offered much more conditionally, and the institutions and funding agencies are beginning to call in overdrawn lines of credit.

Such are the contradictions and pitfalls of an enterprise culture. And if, in the early nineties, we may see the end of Thatcherism in its pure state, we may also witness the beginning of an enterprise culture as an achieved form. The contradictions of the realignment which the term 'enterprise culture' implies seem inevitable in the remarriage of two terms which were divorced at the end of the nineteenth century when culture became the distinguishing mark of those who were in a position to rise above mere enterprise.

How do these contradictions affect large public institutions, specifically large cultural institutions such as the British Film Institute? There seem to be certain consistencies and tendencies of which, from the outside, two seem of immediate relevance to the BFI.

First, administration itself. There is evidence of quite painful systems failure in many large cultural institutions as they re-tool for enterprise. The language of managerialism seems to be in place before there is the infrastructure to support it. In the universities, for instance, the language of devolved fiscal responsibility seems to have preceded by a long way the training of academics to read balance sheets. Everywhere, the reshaping of areas of responsibility seems to precede the managerial skills of tact and consultation which might make it acceptable. For the BFI it is clear that the language of sponsorship and entrepreneurialism is what brings in official support; but how does such an Institute speak that administrative and managerial language without being in bad faith with the principles of public service and the critical cultural theories which gave it its identity in the first place, and which established its centrality within its key constituencies? The more ideological luggage an institution carries, the more difficult the transition – and the BFI, to its credit, has never been light on ideological luggage.

Second, 'leadership'. It cannot be coincidence that a number of the most public cultural institutions have, in the past few years, replaced charismatic authority with managerial and accountancy skills. We seem to have seen the passing of a generation of male 'leaders' by whom institutions and eras were identified: the Isaacs years at Channel Four, or Tony Smith's BFI, or even, in hindsight, Milne's BBC. Each of the changes, taken individually, made its own sense. When seen collectively, however, patterns emerge. The most obvious is that they continue to be men. Less obviously, while an accountant may carry a lot of authority in orthodox business structures because he or she knows what the figures mean, authority within cultural institutions tends to be measured in different terms. The leader who comes with the reputation of being nothing more than a good administrator may smack of mere trade for a public culture which has its roots in the enterprise/culture divorce. Hence, perhaps, the phenomenon of the very powerful lieutenant identified with the culture of the institution: at the BBC, John Birt ('the programme-maker') supports Michael Checkland ('the accountant'); at the BFI, Colin MacCabe ('the radical intellectual') supports Wilf Stevenson ('the higher education administrator'). While the reversal from charismatic leader backed by strong administrator to administrative leader backed by charismatic lieutenant seems symptomatic of an enterprise culture, its effects on the administration of culture and its institutions remain to be seen. One possible effect might be the separation of 'charisma' from the checks

of final responsibility: a kind of Light Brigade approach to administration.

Nowhere is the re-tooling of the cultural institutions more pointed than at the BFI. Partly because there are relatively few places to go from the BFI, partly also because there is a commitment by many staff to the cultural work of the BFI, there is a remarkable continuity of personnel from the heady days of the seventies. From the outside, with some envy, it always seemed like a place where the demands and advances of feminism, the gay movement, ethnicity, if not always met, have at least been kept on the agenda. So, for many of us who work in cultural or educational institutions, to watch the BFI accommodating to enterprise, to new staffing structures, to profile building, to marketing, is to watch our own professional life flash past with the painful objectivity of distance, and a sneaking sense of something betrayed.

What is actually happening?

In autumn 1988, Anthony Smith was succeeded as Director of the BFI by his deputy, Wilf Stevenson. Though at the time this seemed like little more than the predictable rite of succession of the enterprise culture, the charismatic elder statesman passing the conch to the emergent administrator, the change at the top heralded some very significant shifts of personnel and of structure. A new Research division appeared, enveloping Education, Information and Publishing, and headed by Colin MacCabe. Philip Simpson left the Institute to return to teaching, and Manuel Alvarado, formerly of the Broadcasting Research Unit, was appointed Head of Education. Following a management consultancy report, the Publishing division was reorganized along more commercial lines. The Head of the National Film Archive left. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, formerly Head of Publishing, became a Senior Research Fellow. Penelope Houston, standard bearer of the Great Tradition of British film culture, will no longer be editor of *Sight & Sound*.

One of the first public acts was the withdrawal of the BFI's subsidy to its grant-in-aid body, SEFT (the Society for Education in Film and Television), a body with which the BFI as an institution had always had a tetchy relationship, seeing it, through its publication of *Screen* and *Screen Education*, as a rival centre of intellectual authority over the definition of film, television and media studies. Wilf Stevenson, on arrival, regarded SEFT as inefficient and unnecessary, given the success of the BFI's own Education department, under Philip Simpson and Cary Bazalgette, in securing official recognition for its definition of media studies. The subsidy duly withdrawn, SEFT was dissolved, and *Screen* moved to the John Logie Baird Centre at the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde. (As editors of the journal and directors of the Centre, we have a particular awareness of the contradictions of benefiting from measures which we cannot support.)

Within the enclosed conditions of British cultural institutions it is difficult not to pick through these entrails, and to find in them exactly those refined brutalities which 'new management' finds itself adopting in response to the shifts in the culture which it is there to administer. The BFI feels the shock-waves of the battering which the concept of public service and the support of public culture has taken in an era of privatisation. It also frequently seems perplexed by the fragmentation of the educational constituency which originally it helped to define. At the same time, as an institution which is answerable to a much wider constituency than the educational sector, it finds itself pulled between notions of 'the public', and a quite laudable desire to extend that public; notions of the 'industry', within which it would like to be more influential; and notions of a core constituency, the teachers, film-makers and intellectuals who constitute its historical heartland.

To take up the issue of public service: it is tempting to place a lot of symbolic weight on the departure of Anthony Smith who has been, perhaps, the most articulate and urbane defender of public service broadcasting over the last fifteen years, and who, through his contribution to the Annan Committee in 1979, played a central role in ushering in Channel Four. But it would be misleading to see Smith's BFI as a last bastion of public service resistance to an encroaching enterprise culture. Smith left, in fact, at the moment of the BFI's greatest entrepreneurial triumph, the successful launch of MOMI, the Museum of the Moving Image, and under his benign leadership the BFI consolidated its position in the new culture not only materially but also ideologically – Media Studies, as defined by the BFI, was officially recognized in the planning for the new national curriculum. Indeed, the BFI is reputedly Margaret Thatcher's favourite state 'charity', and even if what she really approves is the ability to raise private money (which mostly means Getty money), nevertheless, the BFI, unlike either the BBC or the universities, seemed to survive the eighties without that nagging sense of corners cut, quality of provision squeezed, and more and more time wasted defending what one has got.

This is, of course, an outsider's view, and there is a price to be paid for an honoured place in the New Britain. The current redefinition of public service which is going on in a number of areas of national life makes for a loss of intellectual purpose, and an awkward hesitation while values and activities which had seemed to be self-justifying in the past are submitted to balance sheets and identified as cost centres. What Stevenson in fact inherited from Smith was an unresolved contradiction between enterprise and service values.

The key to understanding this is MOMI, a highly successful crowd-puller whose approach echoes (and indeed prefigured) developments in the museum world and, in particular, the heritage

industry. MOMI bills itself as 'the world's most exciting cinema and television museum', and the key word is 'exciting'. To excite its visitors MOMI offers 'hands-on' experiences (Be interviewed by Barry Norman! Share the thrills of the stunt cameraman!), and a kind of living cinema and television mythology (Climb aboard the Soviet Agit-prop train! Be bossed around by a Hollywood floor manager! Tune in to those old television sets!). This is to demystify the cinematic and televisual process in order to remystify it. Going around MOMI is, in the end, like taking a Hollywood studio tour or visiting Granada's *Coronation Street* theme park. The real excitement and interest of seeing how things work drives out any questions about why they work that way, or how they might work differently. It is also to re-establish a mythological crest-line of cinema and television history, reconstructed as heritage. MOMI is a fun museum, but it is not, for all its special events and school trips, an educational one—at least not in the sense of the 'empowering' media education for which the BFI once fought.

We are taking the Museum as symbolic of wider shifts in BFI's relationship to its educational constituency and to the public which it serves. The point to stress is that for MOMI the 'public' means paying customers who must be 'satisfied' with a good experience. Even more importantly, in MOMI the BFI reaches its public (tax payers as well as tourists) directly, not mediated through the educators, writers, film-makers and programmers who have been the main recipients of BFI support in the past. There are two components in the resulting definition of public service: first, populism—the assumption that there is a 'public' out there, with existing film and television interests that the BFI should meet and represent; second, market pluralism—the assumption that there are different social and taste constituencies out there, each with its own existing film and television interests that the BFI should meet and represent. Either way, the 'public' which the BFI now serves must be addressed *on its own terms*. Wilf Stevenson has always been explicit that if the BFI is to have a significant public presence, to have political influence as the voice of British film culture, then it must be seen to be a popular, not an elite, institution: MOMI, not *Screen*, should be its model of communication.

This leads to the other aspect of public service under Thatcher: its value as source of income. The 'services' the BFI provides, its resources (the archive, the knowledge, the expertise) should be exploited—hence the BFI's new publishing emphasis on commercial co-production; hence the current exploration of how the National Film Archive or the National Film Theatre or visiting fellows can be used as a source of TV programming. The populist justification for this might be that it represents a kind of redistribution of intellectual wealth. But the BFI, like the BBC or the British Library, is in a strong position to fetishize history, to turn knowledge into a

commodity. And if BFI knowledge (whether embedded in the archive, in publications or in personnel) is to be sold, then film and television teachers, who have always relied on this knowledge are likely to find themselves competing for access to BFI goods with clients who are better resourced than they are (television programme-makers, for example). Perhaps more significantly, the increasing commodification of the BFI's resources entails the packaging of knowledge into forms determined by potential markets rather than by the diverse needs of educationists. Even if there is more access, it is access in centrally determined ways and knowledge comes to be defined in market-led forms. This is one of the central contradictions of the market definition of public service. Its anti-elitist claims ('giving the public what they want') are denied by the market reality that some 'people' and their wants are more valuable than others.

But if the BFI's educational role is at the heart of the contradiction between its public service and entrepreneurial activities, there is also a crisis in the media education world itself. One of the BFI's achievements in the 1970s was to bring together in common cause two potentially quite different educational interest groups: school teachers, on the one hand, still hoping to teach children to 'discriminate' in their film and television viewing; film academics, on the other, seeking to legitimate film (and, to a lesser extent, television) studies as a university or polytechnic subject with an elaborate theoretical apparatus. The shared pedagogical task (which allowed *Screen* and *Screen Education* to feature the same authors and attract the same readers) was to expose 'specific signifying practices' and the production of pleasure and ideology as processes. The emphasis was on close 'motivated' textual analysis, and the success of the BFI and SEFT in defining media studies embedded film at the centre of, and provided a model for, a media theory which was quite distinct from existing sociologies of media. The belief that this was a shared project was reflected in the integration of the BFI's publishing and educational activities, in its summer schools and conferences, its teaching packs, its scholarly monographs, its magazines: all, it seemed, developing the same analytical line.

In the 1980s, the BFI's educational constituency began to unravel. Once film studies departments were established in universities, they began to take on the characteristics of academic departments, to reflect the increasing concern for research records, publication lists, evidence of scholarship. Film studies, in short, was drawn into constituting itself as an academic discipline, its theoretical and scholarly interests less and less concerned with the general problems of pedagogy and the educational apparatus. At the same time, the increasing presence of media studies on secondary school curricula drew media teachers inevitably into the mainstream of school

politics. The problems of 'correct theory' had to be answerable to the immediate questions of assessment and standards and classroom practice. And as the gap between higher education scholarship and the school classroom opened up there appeared within it a strand of film and television teaching that had been neglected, or deliberately ignored, in *Screen* debates: the Further Education concern for vocational work, for film and television education as craft training.

This is the context in which to understand anxieties about the dissolution of SEFT, a Society which, with varying degrees of success, had attempted to hold together the general educational constituency. One response has been the formation, within the diverse interests of the tertiary sector, of the Association of Media, Film and Television Studies (AMFTS); but, potentially at least, this accentuates rather than dissolves the division between tertiary and secondary education, and, even within the tertiary sector, it contains rather than resolves the differences of interest, attempting to address with a single grouping the pressing need for a scholarly association, a resource support group, and a defensive lobby. The 1970s consensus will not easily be recreated.

Except, perhaps, around opposition to the BFI's plan to offer its own graduate programme. At the same conference which, not coincidentally, gave people the final impetus to form AMFTS, Wilf Stevenson announced—publically for the first time—the BFI's intention to offer its own graduate programme: a one-year taught Masters course accredited by one of the London colleges, but taught by BFI staff, using BFI resources. The apparent emergence of the BFI into the rather fragile educational arena as a competitor rather than a support created different forms of alarm in different constituencies. For the secondary sector, it seems to mark a shift of BFI interest from secondary to higher education; for the polytechnic sector, it is seen as unfair competition for students and student grants; for the universities, it is seen as a misuse of BFI resources (it is hard enough now for students to get at the archive, for example) which could have been used to stimulate a diversity of postgraduate work rather than to concentrate it in the centre.

However reasonable these immediate expressions of anxiety and self-interest, the important constitutional question to ask about the BFI's graduate plans concerns not their effect on film and television education outside the Institute, but their implication for the BFI's conception of its own educational role. Even if, as present rumours suggest, the more ambitious plans are not realized (the resource implications remain daunting) for the BFI even to consider them signals a decisive change in its higher educational policy: one way or another, direct pedagogical intervention rather than indirect resource support is now on the BFI's agenda. Such a change raises important questions about the BFI's status as a public body, let alone as, historically, a public service institution.

Educationally and culturally, whose need does the proposed course serve? There is, indeed, a real need in the UK for a specialist postgraduate course, or specialist courses, which would use the advanced resources of archive, library and production experience which the BFI has to offer; but that is not the course which they propose. Instead they want to compete in the market place for the training of general media intellectuals. Whose need does this serve—other than that of BFI general intellectuals? (Relations between the BFI and its educational constituency are not improved by imputations leaking out from inside the Institute that film studies has not lived up to the promise defined for it by *Screen* in the seventies.) Almost more dispiriting than the announcement that such a course was definitely going to be offered is the possibility that the plan is simply going to be abandoned. The impression is of a slightly flaky policy of 'try it and see'. If it was ever worth doing, and if it was thought worth risking the trust of the constituency for, then it was worth doing well. A postgraduate course, properly structured, with credit transfer, and exchanges and placements and networked into existing and potential provision, developed with real collaboration, is exactly the kind of initiative which could give the BFI a genuinely national dimension and a very positive role in British higher education: enterprising, but culturally democratic. Educationally and culturally, as well as nationally and regionally, the specific course which the BFI proposes answers no agreed need. It is only in the context of the construction of the 'public' as a 'market' that it begins to make sense. It is a piece of BFI 'enterprise', justified as a way of reaching a film culture 'market' directly, of exploiting in-house expertise and research resources as marketable services rather than public service.

From where we stand, in Scotland, but only four hundred miles away from London, the BFI begins to seem a little remote. We know that individuals within the Institute are committed to regionality, but the institution itself seems to exert a gravitational pull towards the metropolitan centre. This may return us to the personality and the personalities of the BFI. At the cultural heart of the Institute there are a number of quite confident and very articulate intellectuals, marked by sharp political differences, but inhabiting a broad church—left, left/liberal or liberal—which recognises notions of the progressive, and has at least a memory of the radical. In such an environment, differences of policy and practice are both politicised *and dramatised*: private differences become public dramas. The self-dramatisation is important. From the outside it often feels as if the BFI, when it has surprised itself by arriving, more or less, at an internal policy consensus, believes miraculously that the issue has now thoroughly been talked through, and that the internal consensus must constitute a national consensus. The result is that the constituency is continually taken aback by

policy shifts and initiatives which emanate from the centre, *ex cathedra*, in response to no demonstrated external need. This runs from library opening hours to educational priority areas. While respecting the politics, the dramatisation seems to run the risk of raising the gravitational pull to a critical mass—from which no real light escapes.

The BFI probably carries too much ideological luggage, and has stored up far too many historical contradictions, to enter fully the glittering pantheon of the enterprise culture. It has, however, every chance of being a jewel in the crown. There are still fears that AMFTS, established at least in part to protect the tertiary educational constituency from the depredations of government funding and policy-making agencies, will end up having to defend the constituency from the monopolistic and centralist tendencies of the BFI. In the end, this seems unlikely. Despite quite material feelings of resentment, irritation and anxiety, there still remain, even if precariously, historical affiliations. But there is another danger: the danger of burn-out, of the disappointment of great ideas crumbling under ill-laid schemes, of a sense of isolation from the wider constituency which still believes in the possibilities of a diverse media culture and is getting on with its work. In such a scenario the BFI could, in the course of a decade, become simply functional, offering packages, services and a bit of glitz, but no longer central to the developing agenda of media culture: a kind of *fin de siècle* version of the National Trust or the Scottish Museums Council or the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

reviews

review article:

JOHN HILL

Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday*. 1973, 391pp.

Jeffrey Richards, *Swordsmen of the Screen: From Douglas Fairbanks to Michael York*. 1977, 296pp.

Colin Shindler, *Hollywood Goes to War: Film and American Society 1939–52*. 1979, 152pp.

Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: From Karl May to Sergio Leone*. 1981, 304pp.

Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930–1939*. 1984, 374pp.

Derek Elley, *The Epic Film: Myth and History*. 1985, 223pp.

Graham Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922–1931*. 1985, 257pp.

Stephen G. Jones, *The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918–1939*. 1987, 248pp.

Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds), *Mass-Observation at the Movies*. 1987. 477pp.

Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909–1925*. 1988, 160pp.

James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship in Action, 1913–1972*. 1989, 190pp.

Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939–1948*. 1989, 278pp.

Peter Stead, *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society*. 1989, 272pp.

'Cinema and Society' is the title of a series of books under the general editorship of Jeffrey Richards and published by Routledge.

Since the publication of Richards's own *Visions of Yesterday* in 1973, a further twelve volumes have appeared, half of them in the last three years. As with all series of this kind, the 'Cinema and Society' title has, to some extent, served as a label of convenience for a variety of books of different kinds. Initially, the emphasis of the series was on surveys of relatively neglected film types or genres (the imperial film, the swashbuckler, the war film, the epic and the spaghetti western) aimed at the general reader; while latterly the series has consisted of more conventionally academic discussions of various aspects of British cinema. It is these later volumes with which I will be primarily concerned. Not only have they provided the series with a greater coherence than it previously possessed, but they have also generated a degree of internal debate which makes it appropriate for them to be considered together. The key volume in this respect is undoubtedly Jeffrey Richards's *The Age of the Dream Palace*, which is not only the most substantial work in the series but also the one which in a sense 'sets the agenda' for many of the titles which follow. As such it provides a good starting point for a more general discussion of the series and the issues which it raises, particularly those relating to the study of ideology and film censorship.

In *Visions of Yesterday*, Richards had been primarily concerned to describe what he labelled the 'cinema of Empire': those films, both British and American, which 'detail the attitudes, ideals and myths of British Imperialism'. (p. 2) Although the films are linked to a preceding ideology and literature of Empire, they are largely discussed in isolation from their immediate cinematic context of production and exhibition. In *The Age of the Dream Palace*, however, Richards is more directly concerned to situate his discussion of British films of the 1930s in relation to the context and constraints within which they were produced. His general argument is that films of the period largely conformed to the dominant ideology and 'for the most part played their role in maintaining consensus and the status quo'. (p. 324) His central explanation for this is censorship: 'It is the censorship system', Richards argues, rather than 'the dictates of commercial necessity or the artistic vision of production chiefs', which provided 'the framework within which the cinema operated as a cultural and social force'. (p. 89) This emphasis is echoed both in James C. Robertson's *The Hidden Cinema*, in which it is argued that censorship has 'exerted a greater influence upon film history than is often immediately apparent' (p. 5), and also more generally in the writings of film historians, where censorship has often been regarded as 'the first reality'.¹

Both Richards and Robertson add considerably to our understanding of the workings of the British Board of Film Censors (particularly during the 1930s and 1940s when a script vetting system

¹ See, for example, Nicholas Pronay, 'The first reality: film censorship in liberal England', in K.R.M. *Feature Films as History*, Short (ed.), (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

was in operation), and provide plenty of evidence to justify their arguments regarding the ideologically conservative nature of censorship. However, there is also a sense in which they overstate their case and attribute too great a power to censorship in circumscribing the potentially subversive, or merely plural, meanings of film texts. This is in part an empirical issue concerning the abilities of censors fully to appreciate the aesthetic and ideological subtleties of the individual films and scripts which they encounter. But it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a theoretical issue concerning the degree to which the semiotic productivity of the film text may 'outstrip' the operations of censorship.

As Annette Kuhn argues in her *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality*, the model of censorship employed by Richards and Robertson not only involves an overly deterministic conception of power, but also relegates the films themselves to secondary importance in the inquiry (see pp. 3–4). Thus, in the case of Robertson, the absence of any consideration of actual films inevitably exaggerates the restrictive power of censorship and its success in achieving its ends, when the evidence of film texts might suggest otherwise (as in the case of *Victim* [1961], for example). Richards does follow up his discussion of censorship with a consideration of films, but his conclusions either only barely substantiate his dominant ideology thesis (the identification of Jessie Matthews's 'middle-class individualism', for example, seems a shade forced), or appear to underestimate the degree of internal complexity, or even tension, in individual films (the extent to which Gracie Fields, for example, personifies 'consensus' seems less clearcut than Richards suggests).

Part of the problem here is that the emphasis on scripts in Richards's discussion of censorship is carried over into his discussion of the films themselves, discussion which is concerned primarily with plot, character and theme (which are generally conceived independently of style). Richards is aware of the dangers in this and, responding to criticisms of *Visions of Yesterday*, puts in a defence of what he describes as 'the literary interpretation'. (p. 5) His argument is that most of the films he discusses were based either on novels or on plays, and that under the 'strict studio conditions' of the 1930s 'the visuals are chosen to match the message, to tell the story as it is written'. (p. 6) Ironically in doing this he also agrees with critics from an entirely different perspective, those who have traditionally lamented the apparent stylistic impoverishment of British cinema.²

However, while the subordination of visual style to plot is a characteristic of all classical narrative cinema, not just of British cinema of the 1930s, style is never simply a neutral vehicle for plot, even in the least imaginative of productions. It will inevitably involve, albeit to different degrees, an amplification of, elaboration

2 For an influential statement of this position, see Thomas Elsaesser, 'Between style and ideology', *Monogram*, no. 3 (1972).

3 Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 165.

upon, and even on occasion a subversion of, the meanings suggested by the script. And while stylistic richness might have been more commonly associated with American than with British cinema, it was still possible, as Tom Ryall has argued, for Alfred Hitchcock, working within the studio conditions of the 1930s, to produce a number of formally and intellectually selfconscious works, which operated at 'the limits of classical cinema'.³ Admittedly, Richards excludes Hitchcock – somewhat problematically – from his analysis, on the grounds of his exceptional 'creative intelligence' (p. 5); but it is true, nonetheless, that many British films of the 1930s possess a greater formal interest than Richards is prepared to allow. A focus only on the plot of a film such as Basil Dean's *Sing As We Go* (1934), for example, would clearly fail to do justice not only to its formal and stylistic complexity, but also, I would argue, to its moments of ideological subversiveness.

A similar weakness is to be found in Robert Murphy's otherwise valuable survey of British cinema in the 1940s, *Realism and Tinsel*. Although he shares with Richards a concern to place films in their social and industrial contexts, he is preoccupied less with matters of ideology than with the critical rehabilitation of a number of cinematic types (loosely categorized as costume pictures, contemporary melodramas, gangster films, morbid thrillers and comedies) which he regards as having been unfairly neglected by the critics, with their traditional preference for works of realism and social relevance. His argument, clearly important, links with a trend in British film criticism towards defending those films (such as the work of Powell and Pressburger, or Hammer horror) which have characteristically defied the conventions of social realism. However, it is an argument which requires the support of detailed film analysis, and here Murphy's concern, like Richards's, with 'thematic patterns' (p. 2) makes it difficult for him to substantiate his case fully and to bring out successfully the aesthetic and ideological complexities of the films he is championing.

There are two aspects to this. In the first case, Murphy is, probably correctly, reluctant to make exaggerated claims for the artistic merit of some of the films he is describing. By the same token, however, he is almost equally reluctant to make such claims on behalf of films which might legitimately merit them. Thus while a film such as *Night and the City* (1950) is recommended for its 'marvellously evocative impression of London at night' (p. 164), its clearly superior level of achievement compared with other 'spiv' films of the period is barely registered, let alone accounted for. Moreover, despite the book's polemic, there is still a certain conservatism in the way in which judgements are arrived at, and a timidity about recasting the terms in which films might be analysed and evaluated. Murphy argues, for example, that *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (1948) is not 'a film which stands up to detailed

critical scrutiny'. (p. 188) What he means by this is that he finds it 'irritatingly shoddy'. This may be so, but it does not follow that the film would not reward further critical investigation, especially given its immense popularity, its peculiar hybridisation of British and American cinematic traditions, and its apparent provision of an outlet for attitudes and emotions normally suppressed in British films. What is required, in this case, is not simply a closer attention to the operations of the film text, but also a way of conceptualizing the film in relation to more general ideological processes.

However, if a full understanding of the relations between film and ideology requires a closer regard to formal detail than either Richards or Murphy provide, it must also entail a consideration of the role of the audience, and of their readings of film texts. This is an argument developed by Stephen G. Jones in *The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918–1939*, in which the author criticises Richards's view of the British cinema in the 1930s as an ideological instrument for maintaining the status quo. His main argument here is that the ideological effectiveness of films in this period cannot simply be 'read off' the intentions of the censor or the economic interests of the film business. Following Richards, Jones notes that the cinema audience was primarily working class, and argues that the film industry had to cater to popular tastes and attitudes. Moreover, he suggests, working-class culture in the 1930s was 'fairly resistant to formal incorporation in the hegemonic culture' (p. 21), and hence the working-class cinema audience would not necessarily interpret a film's message in the manner which was intended (although he also disagrees with Richards's portrait of the general conservatism of British films in the 1930s). This also links to an argument of Annette Kuhn's in *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality* regarding the difficulties facing the censor in regulating the ways in which working-class audiences would interpret individual films (see, in particular, her discussion of the VD film).

Jones, in this respect, raises a crucial area of inquiry – but fails to pursue it, in part because of his emphasis on the organised labour movement's relationship to the cinema rather than on the working class and cinema more generally. As a result, his claim that 'working-class people used the cinema in their own ways and on their own terms' (p. 27) remains by and large unsubstantiated; while his emphasis on films simply as 'escape' from the rigours of work prevents him from developing any explanation of how working-class audiences might generate readings of texts which resist dominant ideological constructions (and hence of how film texts might themselves be profitably analysed as sites, as he puts it, of 'ideological contestation'). Some evidence of what audiences actually thought of films during this period is provided in Part One of *Mass Observation at the Movies* (in its study of

4 Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987).

'Worktown'/Bolton); but, fascinating though much of this material is, a bald enumeration of individual comments, independent of any theoretical perspective, is relatively unilluminating. What is required is not only more empirical evidence but also an analytical approach which can combine textual analysis with a conceptualization of readership in social and historical terms. Michael Denning's analysis of nineteenth-century dime novels in relation to their working-class readership provides a suggestive example in this respect.⁴

Something like this might also have been expected of Peter Stead's *Film and the Working Class*; but the book is a major disappointment, for it barely begins to get to grips with the issues raised by its avowed topic. Class, or indeed the working class, is never actually defined or even discussed in conceptual terms, while the problems involved in accounting for the production and reception of films in societies divided by class are scarcely registered, let alone addressed. There is no attempt to specify how the social and industrial contexts of film production might shape the ways in which the working class is seen on the cinema screen, or how readings of films might vary according to social class (or, for that matter, given Stead's militantly philistine approach to criticism, of how any readings other than 'commonsense' ones might become proper objects of inquiry). Indeed, strangely, the book's opening chapters are concerned hardly at all with the relations between film and the working class. Chapter One develops an argument about the early American cinema's pursuit of middle-class respectability, while Chapter Two follows up with a cursory discussion of those filmmakers (Griffith, Chaplin, Vidor) whom Stead sees as having successfully convinced middle-class intellectuals of cinema's 'significance'. These chapters set a pattern for much of what follows: not a discussion of film and the working class as such, but an increasingly wearying survey of middle-class critics and their oft-repeated demands for a more socially committed or 'realistic' use of cinema (as in both Britain and America in the 1930s). However, since Stead is also at pains to emphasize that this enthusiasm for social commitment was rarely shared by working-class audiences, it makes his emphasis on critics not only puzzling but also, given his claim that critics might on occasion be regarded as spokesmen for the people, something of a nonsense.

Far more helpful in this respect is Annette Kuhn's *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925*, which, in addition to making a valuable contribution to our understanding of censorship, is concerned to contribute more generally to debates about the theorisation of film. Her project is to challenge the traditional conception of censorship as an act of prohibition undertaken by a special kind of institution, in favour of a notion of censorship in terms of the socially and historically specific 'ensemble of powers,

practices, and discourses' (p. 10) in which it is embedded. In doing this, she is involved in a broader critique of the 'text-context dualism' which she sees as governing not only the study of film censorship but film studies as a whole. Thus, in her case studies of early British censorship she not only shows how censorship depends upon an interaction of institutional and textual practices, but also indicates how, in her terms, the social inhabits meaning in the way that film texts are read. Thus, to take two of her examples, Kuhn demonstrates how the 'meanings' of a text may require extratextual knowledge in order to be fully activated (as with *Maisie's Marriage* [1923]), or how extratextual discourses may impose a 'meaning' upon a text not necessarily underwritten, or implied, by the text itself (*Where Are My Children* [1916]). The strength of this work is its combination of attention to textual detail with recognition of the socio-historical variability of a text's reception – even if this does create an element of unresolved tension between the critic's reading of the text on the one hand, and those readings which have in fact been socially and historically activated on the other.

Kuhn's attempt to cross the divide between what have often been taken as incompatible approaches to the study of film is also important in the context of *Screen*. Jeffrey Richards's *The Age of the Dream Palace*, for example, was dismissed by *Screen* when it first appeared.⁵ The problem with this was not that the criticisms of the book were wrong (although they were ungenerous to the book's wealth of scholarship and detail), so much as that they were mounted in a generally unproductive 'either-or' fashion. Richards's predominantly 'sociological' approach to the study of the British cinema, for example, was contrasted with the critical emphasis on 'aesthetics and style' in studies of Hollywood. Thus, it is suggested, a film such as *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) 'is as likely to be discussed in terms of its genre (melodrama) or its auteur (Nicholas Ray) as it is in terms of its "overt" subject-matter (youth, youth culture and the "social problem" of the generation gap)'. (p. 6) This may be so, but it does not necessarily follow, as is implied, that the first approach is superior. For while the underestimation of 'aesthetics and style' in studies of British cinema is undoubtedly a shortcoming, it could equally well be argued that a neglect of questions of 'ideology and society' has been inhibiting for studies of the American cinema, creating gaps which are only now being filled.⁶ Instead of counterposing the two approaches, it would be far more useful to attempt to bring them together, and so encourage work capable of addressing questions of society and ideology without necessarily sacrificing a concern for formal detail or for the productivity of the film text. What such a project might involve is suggested by Fredric Jameson's insistence on the importance of grasping culture not only 'in and for itself, but also in relationship to its outside, its content, its context and its space of intervention and

⁵ See, Andrew Higson and Steve Neale, 'Introduction: components of the national film culture', *Screen*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1985).

⁶ See, most recently, Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Film* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983).

7 Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Postmodernism', *New Left Review*, no. 176 (1989), p. 42.

of effectivity.⁷ While such a programme may be out of fashion, it is important that the need for it be restated. It is also a programme which not only the 'Cinema and Society' series, but also *Screen* itself, could profitably pursue.

review article:

SIMON FRITH

Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism*. New York and London: Routledge, 1989, 157pp.

Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1989, 269pp.

Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, 238pp.

Popular culture, as Morag Shiach remarks, makes intellectuals anxious. She's referring specifically to the way in which TV critics in the quality press nervously distance themselves from the public's pleasure in the medium; but in *Discourse on Popular Culture* she places this anxiety historically, showing how deeply the problem of popular culture is embedded in the organization of class and gender power that defines modern capitalism. Not the least of the salutary fascinations of her book is its constant revelation of how long the cultural issues debated today have been cultural issues. Eighteenth-century commentators on the 'authenticity' of 'peasant poetry', for example, would immediately recognize the terms of argument of contemporary critics of the 'authenticity' of 'world music'.

Popular culture makes intellectuals anxious because it threatens their authority as intellectuals. For nineteenth-century British cultural theorists who, as Shiach shows, laid down many of our taken-for-granted attitudes to technology, 'escapism' and the crowd, the threat was direct. 'Popular culture' described something subversive, conjured up modes of expression and forms of symbolic action that not only excluded 'traditional' intellectuals, but even threatened to replace them altogether with radical thinkers and

class- and gender-conscious fantasists. For the postwar American intellectuals who are the subject of Andrew Ross's *No Respect*, popular culture fed a different sort of anxiety, a lurking, well-founded suspicion that even if they pronounced authoritatively for pop songs and TV and comic books, no-one would listen: in the cacophony of hucksters' voices in this marketplace, intellectuals had no special reason to be heard at all. By now the issue was not the control of popular by dominant culture but the development of a dominant *and* popular culture in which academy-trained ideologues weren't needed. Their place was taken well enough by a rich variety of hacks and quacks and advertisers.

If a nineteenth-century mandarin like Matthew Arnold could, then, hope, however pessimistically, to *contain* popular culture – primarily through education policy, secondarily through the promotion of high art and the policing of the low – the contemporary American intellectual, whether fulminating against Harlequin Romance or celebrating *Miami Vice*, knows that he or she has no effect at all on the popular meanings of these texts. Even a contemporary Arnold figure, like Allen Bloom, derives his cultural authority not from the encrusted familiarity of his arguments, nor from his university chair, but rather from the weeks his book spent at the top of the *New York Times* best seller list, and from his familiarity as a TV talk show guest. These days the institutions of popular culture 'contain' intellectuals, not vice versa.

The anxiety of contemporary pop commentators is about their place in these institutions. Arnold (and Adorno and Leavis) could (in their different ways) divide the world magisterially into 'us', the enlightened, and 'them', the philistine. Nowadays cultural theorists crave to say 'we' – even Bloom phrases his diatribe against mass culture in the robust tones of a populist. And for those who come to praise mass culture, the anxiety is catching. Isn't the very act of 'intellectualizing' the popular (a close reading of *The Cosby Show* or *Batman* or Madonna) a move away from it, a form of misreading? How on earth can 'we' be sure that a film analysis in *Screen* has any more weight than one in the *Sun*?

The twitchy tendency to like everything, just in case, is apparent in Jim Collins's *Uncommon Cultures*. His underlying thesis is straightforward. The postmodern condition, he suggests, is an effect of popular culture. If 'postmodernism' describes the 'fragmentation' of culture, then what was crucial to this process (and like most postmodern theorists Collins is hazy about dates) was the development of culture as a commodity. For Collins, to equate the popular and the commercial is to define the popular by market forces, by discourses and aesthetics *competing* for attention. He rejects both hegemonic notions of mass culture (and images of the pop audience as a monolith) and pluralist accounts of 'democratic culture', the harmonious play of separate taste publics. Rather, all

of us (the 'we' is paramount in this sort of text) are sites on which conflicting identities and affinities are constantly being glimpsed, fought for and refined.

Collins suggests that we can no longer think of culture as a Grand Hotel, a series of rooms occupied by separate guests, serviced by teams of variously skilled workers, kept running by a central guiding intelligence. Now we occupy changing spaces without guidance, and each pop discourse claims rhetorically to embody a worldview. If no such discourse can, in fact, operate without reference to another one – cultural identity depends on a series of differentiations – the hierarchy of discourses once taken for granted (in the terms high and low, for example) has now collapsed. 'Dominance', in Collins's terms, depends on acquiescence: a film or book or TV show is only as powerful as its audience lets it be.

This is a familiar set of moves in American postmodern theory, and it depends explicitly on a reading of so-called British cultural studies (the Birmingham School) in which the key moment of (sub)cultural production is taken to be the moment of consumption (or 'resistance'). Collins himself is less interested in showing that such consumer power *is* exercised than that it *might be*. As a literary critic (the majority of his examples are taken from detective fiction), he is content to show that texts do display competing narratives, that between one popular genre and another there are significant discursive differences, that cultural choice means taking up different subject positions. If each one of us does find in some popular discourse or another 'a satisfying representation of life as we would have it imagined for us', then there are so many 'conflicting modes of representation and divergent ideological positions' that any suggestion that we are all part of the same 'popular culture' is ludicrous:

In other words, commodification may not only be a fact of life as well as a fact of art in the 20th century, but its lack of orchestration, specifically within a Post-Modernist context, has so thoroughly negated its homogenizing force that it can produce only decentred subjects. We may indeed be constantly encouraged to define ourselves through commodities, but the absence of coordination in such a process results in our being asked to define ourselves in quite different ways, thereby producing anything but a uniform subjectivity. (p. 128)

If Collins's concept of postmodernism emerges at the point where Birmingham meets Madison Avenue, it could be argued that the academic concept of 'popular culture' has always been situated somewhere in the mid Atlantic, as American intellectuals looked east for a critique of the American vernacular and European intellectuals looked west for an image of what was likely to go wrong. It is, therefore, instructive to read Shiach's (British) and

Ross's (American) collections of historical case studies side by side.

Morag Shiach is a Cambridge cultural theorist, school of Raymond Williams. Her concern is 'to understand the emergence of the concept of "popular culture" historically and to analyse the assumptions about class, gender and history which are part of that emergence'. (p. 1) Her focus, like Collins's, is on discourses of popular culture, but she is less interested in the discursive strategies of popular forms themselves than in what people – intellectuals – have written and argued about them. Her point is that the ways in which we understand popular culture now are rooted in the terms we have inherited from the past.

In choosing her discursive case studies, then, Shiach chooses the cultural moments and issues which defined key concepts and set up repeated tropes (the Golden Age, the mindless female, the 'incorporated' rebel). If eighteenth-century writers on peasant poetry raised the question of the 'natural', mid nineteenth-century arguments about the periodical press focused on the spectre of technology and on the class-conscious and feminist reader. Folk song collectors at the turn of the present century defined the problem of cultural decadence and made the equation between the popular, the national and the traditional; the workers' theatre movements of the interwar years redefined popular culture as oppositional culture, sought to develop a 'genuine' proletarian alternative to the mass audience.

The issues raised here are, as Shiach intends, familiar. Her purpose is not to provide new insights into popular culture itself, but to expose the constraints within which it is now thought (she ends with a chapter on television); and from this perspective, two points in particular seem irrefutable. First, as she suggests, the 'popular' is always the 'other'; and second, it is produced as such not by 'the people' themselves but in a variety of intellectual attitudes towards them: fear, fascination, jealousy, contempt. For Shiach 'popular culture' describes not a thing but a methodology, a methodology rooted in intellectuals' own anxieties and aspirations – and this is as true for the folk collectors and theatre groups seeking to 'represent' 'real' workers as it is for all those bourgeois intellectuals who have sought to refine and even stifle them.

Andrew Ross's postwar American intellectuals also turned to the popular for a solution to their status problems. But in the USA 'the other' has always been as much a desired as a threatening object; and for a significant strand of American intellectuals pop culture has been something to enjoy, not scrutinize. In this context intellectual distinction rests not on aloofness but on discrimination in the marketplace itself. The intellectual becomes a dandy, rising above the masses by example (and so Ross traces the history of the hip – where black meets white, and the camp – where gay meets straight). But his most suggestive chapter is his first, an intriguing reading of

the Rosenbergs' prose style, which highlights both the complicated relationship between culture and class (popular culture has always been as much a petit bourgeois as a proletarian affair) and, even more sharply, the entwining of politics and taste (in supporting the Rosenbergs politically, intellectuals felt obliged to deny their characteristic banality; to condemn them politically, was also to ridicule their dress sense and prose style).

In the remaining detail-packed essays Ross tells the stories both of postwar US popular culture and of attitudes towards it. One of his themes thus runs in parallel to Shiach's: he shows how the same terms of popular cultural critique (victimization, manipulation, and so on) have been applied to a succession of popular cultural goods, from comic books and game shows to heavy rock and porn videos. But jammed in among these portraits of the intellectual as nay-sayer is a celebration of the intellectuals of pop culture, the r&b musicians and graphic artists and clothes designers and TV writers whose intellectual investment is as much in the body as in the mind, who flaunt their Americanness as an icon of the possible (Ross has a particularly soft spot for Marshall McLuhan, the intellectual as pop star).

Jim Collins, who shares something of Ross's love of pop forms, if not his flair for declaring it, assumes that a politics of popular culture is now impossible: there is no collective force on which it could draw; the 'people' is a misnomer for a disparate, flickering subjectivity. Ross counters this with the ultimate academic move: the political potential of mass culture remains, he suggests, in the shared popular resentment of *the intellectual*:

Intellectuals today are unlikely to recognize what is fully at stake in the new *politics of knowledge* if they fail to understand why so many cultural forms, devoted to horror and porn, and steeped in chauvinism and other bad attitudes, draw their popular appeal from expressions of disrespect for the lessons of educated taste. . . . A politics that only preaches about [the] sexism, racism and militarism while neglecting to rearticulate the popular, resistant appeal of the disrespect will not be a popular politics, and will lose ground in any contest with the authoritarian populist languages that we have experienced under Reaganism and Thatcherism. (p.231)

After reading Ross's celebration of pornography as the (popular) expression of 'autonomous', inarticulate, anti-intellectual desire, and Morag Shiach's account of the historical exclusion of women from definitions of 'the popular', my conclusion is that 'popular culture' just isn't a political site. It is, indeed, a fantasy land, but the fantasies are those projected onto it by (male) intellectuals themselves: intellectuals longing, daring, fearing to transgress; intellectuals wondering what it would be *not to be an intellectual*.

review article:

BARBARA CREED

Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movies*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, 256pp.

'I don't believe in ghosts but I am afraid of them!' This paradoxical statement points to the human desire for the inhuman and the power of the imagination to subsume the rational in its fulfilment of that desire. One approach to the existence of things horrifying in human culture is to look into the inner recesses of the mind, the black pit of the unconscious. How else are we to explain the existence within *all* cultural practices, particularly within contemporary cinema, of the monster in its many guises: witch, vampire, zombie, werewolf, creature, demon, mad scientist, psychopath, alien, poltergeist, cyborg, thing, mummy, and blob? Why do we like being 'scared to death'? What is the relationship, if any, between horror and the everyday world?

In *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, Andrew Tudor explores the latter question. His overall aim is 'to understand genre history as part of a broader process of change'. (p. 212) He analyses basic narrative strategies in order to isolate general patterns in the horror genre's history and development from the 1903s to the 1980s. Tudor's approach leads to a categorization of horror – a position which will not appeal to those interested in a psychoanalytic search for meaning¹ or in a crosscultural, de-formalist analysis which views horror as a modern rite of passage.² *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, however, is an impressive work which presents an interesting thesis about the relationship between the horror genre and contemporary culture. Whatever difficulties the book presents stem from the nature of its approach – an issue I shall take up shortly.

¹ See Robin Wood's essay on horror in *Hollywood, from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

² See James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasure: Anatomy of Modern Horror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Tudor explicitly rejects a psychoanalytic approach to the horror film, in which the genre is positioned as a 'kind of collective dreamworld requiring analysis' by methods adopted from psychoanalysis. (p. 2) In his view, this perspective is overly reductive, and constructs the audience as 'a homogeneous assembly of psychoanalytic dupes'. (p. 3) He adopts instead a sociological framework which he claims does not suffer from these pitfalls. In his view, the meaning of a popular genre is constituted both internally, by the various texts which constitute the tradition, and externally, by the way in which its audience actively constructs its meaning.

Adopting a view of human agency developed by Anthony Giddens, Tudor seeks to develop a 'balanced' approach to genre analysis; that is, one in which theories of the unconscious play only a small part. Human agency, in this view, should be understood in terms of three levels: 'discursive consciousness' and 'unconscious motivation' at either end of the continuum, with 'practical consciousness' in the middle. The latter notion refers to things we know and which help us negotiate daily living, but which we are unable to express. Tudor argues that the audience brings all three modes of understanding to bear when watching a film – although he never seriously discusses what he means by 'unconscious motivation'. Discursive consciousness refers to the spectator's conscious awareness of genre conventions, and practical consciousness to his or her unarticulated knowledge of conventions such as filmic language. By stressing the importance of these two areas, Tudor suggests that the theorist is less likely to dwell exclusively on the area of unconscious motivation, which leads to a 'return of the repressed' approach. Tudor promotes 'practical consciousness' of the genre as the most useful and important area in helping us to understand the historical and cultural significance of the horror film.

Tudor defines genre as 'a special kind of subculture, a set of conventions of narrative, setting, characterization, motive, imagery, iconography and so on, which exists in the practical consciousness of those fluent in its "language"'. (p. 6) He bases his study on a careful analysis of 990 feature films released in Britain between 1931 and 1984. Not all of these texts fall specifically into the horror genre – about twenty per cent belong to companion genres whose definitions overlap with that of horror, such as the thriller and science fiction. Within this framework, Tudor explores the structures of, and changes which have taken place within, three major horror film traditions: the operations of 'mad science'; threats from supernatural; and the horror of the psychotic killer. Tudor uses the notion of 'threat', the horror text's central organizing principle, as a means of analysing the nature of these changes. He examines the nature of the 'threat' at work in a specific text in terms of three sets of categories: supernatural/secular; external/internal;

autonomous/dependent. Horror narratives generally adopt a tripartite narrative pattern: the status quo is disrupted by a threatening figure; the threat is resisted; the threat is removed and the status quo restored. The major change to this pattern is that a closed ending in which the threat has been removed and stability restored is no longer obligatory. Tudor defines the type of threat in terms of the monster; and says that in general, the three major sources from which the threat/monster emanates are science, supernatural and the psyche. He argues that the year 1960 represents a turning point in the history of the genre as regards representations of the monster/threat: for instance, the threat from science dominates the pre-1960 horror film, while the psychotic comes to dominate the following decades.

One of the strengths of this approach is its refusal to countenance spurious media-research arguments about the horror film's supposedly adverse effects on the spectator. Tudor asks questions not about the effect of the horror film on the mind of the malleable spectator but about the nature of the world in which the horror film makes sense: '... if we assume, as we must, that horror movies are intelligible and coherent experiences for their audiences, then we have to ask ourselves what the world must be like for that to be the case.' (p. 212) This is the question which informs his research from the very beginning. By examining the structure of horror-film narratives, he is also examining the cultural and social conditions within which these narratives make sense.

An area in which Tudor is particularly interested is the social construction of fear: '... horror movies are one aspect of the social construction of the fearful in our society: in their prosaic characteristics, first of all, and in the assembly of conventions that we grasp as part of our practical consciousness, they contribute to the shaping of our "landscapes of fear"'.³ However, rather than explore the nature of fear itself and its relation to the unconscious, Tudor categorizes the general changes which have taken place in relation to the representation of the fearful in the horror film.

The central and most significant change which takes place within the genre is from the representation of secure to paranoid horror. Tudor explains these terms by constructing, purely for the sake of clear explication, an 'ideal type' of each form. An 'ideal' text within the secure category would represent a world in which there was a clearcut distinction between the oppositions at play, oppositions which are of a largely external nature: 'life and death, secular and supernatural, human and alien, normal and abnormal matter'. (p. 213) Tudor argues that the boundary between order and disorder must be clearly marked because only in such a secure world is it possible for the 'threat' to be successfully eliminated and normality restored. In the secure category of horror films, the threat is more likely to be external than internal, as boundaries can be more clearly

³ This notion is adapted from Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).

drawn in relation to the former. The secure category is also characterized by the presence of the 'expert'/hero figure who is ultimately effective in destroying the threat. These films also reveal the reliance of the community on paternalistic authorities whose function is largely to remove the need for doubt and insecurity. A closed narrative form, in which all loose ends are tied up, is also central to the horror film during this period.

The paranoid horror film exhibits a completely different set of characteristics. It is marked by oppositions more internal to the individual, such as those between 'conscious and unconscious self, normal and abnormal sexuality, sanity and insanity, collective order and disorder and health and disease'. (p. 215) In the paranoid category boundaries are blurred, the source of the horror is frequently the psyche, order is rarely restored, human intervention is usually ineffectual, the male expert does not figure, narratives are likely to be open-ended. Tudor describes the common narrative structure of this form as an 'open metamorphosis narrative' (p. 216), in which everyone is at risk of contamination and which only stops just short of the complete destruction of the human order. The key figure of the modern horror film is the psychotic, the figure who is likely to change without warning into a deadly killer.

Tudor stresses that these changes, from the world of security to paranoid horror, did not take place suddenly or dramatically. The transition stretched from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, a period when it became increasingly difficult to identify the major features of the genre. How are we to account for this transition? In what kind of world did the secure horror film make sense? Tudor argues that it was a world of traditional values in which the generally repressive institutions of state, family, class, male power and heterosexuality were dominant. In the world of the paranoid horror film, however, these institutions and the values they represented have been eroded. Despite the possibility of a better future in which the orthodoxies of the past no longer hold sway, there is still enormous confusion. It is this nightmare world of confusion which 'paranoid horror holds up for our contemplation'. (p. 223)

Tudor's thesis that the modern horror film is confrontational rather than escapist produces some interesting new readings of classic texts, as well as presenting the reader with a challenging view of the social and cultural function of horror. It does have limitations, however: these stem from its theoretical approach. First, Tudor's formalistic perspective is overly restrictive. In his desire to 'understand genre history as part of a broader process of change' (p. 212) Tudor stresses changes within the genre, frequently at the expense of continuities. For instance, he asserts that post-1960s horror movies express 'a radically different type of anxiety', that is, a profound 'fear of ourselves and of the ill-understood and dangerous forces that lurk within us'. (p. 48) He claims that this

change occurred largely because of the Freudian revolution, which has meant that 'our characteristic view of insanity has been secularized, returned to us'. (p. 49) This has also led to a change in the representation of the monster: 'It is significant . . . that the decline of mad science is almost exactly matched by the rise of the horror-movie psychotic, the genre replacing one form of "madness" with another during the course of the sixties'. (p. 185) Because the mad scientist has been replaced by the psychotic, it does not follow that this necessarily represents a dramatic change in the major concerns of the genre. I would argue that the horror film has always been concerned primarily with our fear of ourselves and with those things that threaten our precarious and culturally constructed sense of self. Horror films whose central characters are mad scientists may equally well express profound insecurities about human nature as those films whose central character is a psychotic killer. The change which has occurred has taken place in relation to the motifs and symbolic forms of expression used to articulate a fear which has always existed. It could be argued, for instance, that in its earlier period the horror film's concern with our fear of ourselves was expressed through other, but equally significant, factors: codes of lighting (*I Walked With A Zombie* [1943]); a symbolic use of several characters to construct the divided self (*Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* [1932]); and a symbolic representation of the forces of the unconscious (*The Creature From The Black Lagoon* [1954]). Because in his analysis Tudor uses only external indicators which are easily identified (such as the nature of the monster and the threat), he neglects other, less tangible, factors which should be considered in a study of this nature.

Tudor also assumes that there is a clearcut, straightforward, relationship between processes of social change and changes which occur within the signifying practices of a culture. While it is possible to isolate specific examples of change within cultural forms and within society at large, it does not follow that the relationship between the two is straightforward. An outsider studying the prominence of imagery of the Virgin Mary within the Catholic faith, for example, might conclude that the reverence accorded her image reflected the high status of women within society. Yet the very opposite is more likely to be true – that the high status of the virgin in mythology masks an underlying misogyny in the 'real'. Similarly, it does not follow that the emergence (or changed expression) of 'paranoid horror' in the post-1960s horror film can be linked definitively to parallel or similar changes taking place in society. There may well be a connection – but it is unlikely to be straightforward, clearly recognizable or easily theorized.

This leads to a further point of criticism. Although Tudor acknowledges questions of gender in his study, he fails to give them serious attention. He mentions that the mad scientist (p. 85) and the

expert (p. 113) are invariably male; that the psychotic of the stalker film, in which camera and monster share the same viewpoint, is also male and his victim usually female. (p. 118) He also mentions that in the pre-1970s horror film 'it is very rare to find women occupying the narrative and social focus other than as victims, and where this is not the case . . . the crucial locus of expertise and ultimate success invariably remains male'. (p. 126) He states that although modern 'female protagonists are more significant [and] are permitted more autonomy and resourcefulness than were the "heroines" of earlier films', the potent heroine is still an exception. (p. 127) However, he makes no real attempt to analyse the cultural construction of the misogyny which runs through both major periods of the genre. Surely misogynistic desire constitutes an important source of 'threat', and one which is central not only to the representation of the monster in the horror film but also to Tudor's own concern with the cultural construction of fear? Do female spectators respond differently to threat when it is directed at their gender counterparts on the screen? In what kind of world does the expression of violent forms of misogyny make sense? What sorts of changes have taken place in the representation of man as monster and woman as victim in the cultural history of the horror film?

Yet Tudor makes no allowance for these issues in his ranking system of the sources of horror movie threat. Instead, he simply states: 'Women have always featured as horror-movie victims, and it is therefore to be expected that they should *seem* more prominent in a period of victim centrality'. (p. 127) Yet on the basis of Tudor's other statements, it would appear that all decades have actually been (as distinct from seeming to be) periods of 'victim centrality' for the female protagonist. Why? And why does Tudor ignore this area in his attempt to analyse major changes which have occurred over the decades? Possibly because an analysis of the representation of women in the horror film would have called for a use of psychoanalytic theory, which has played such a crucial role in the feminist critique of the cinema.

But Tudor rejects a psychoanalytic approach, for two main reasons: it is 'inordinately reductive', and also encourages 'esoteric readings' which are not part of the viewer's conscious understanding of the text. (p. 3) If the psychoanalytic approach seems 'inordinately reductive', the reason for this surely lies not with the theory itself but with the theorist. Also, it is difficult to see why a reading should be rejected simply because it 'could not be part of any audience's conscious interpretative apparatus'. (p. 3) Is not the function of interpretation to explore all possible meanings, regardless of the degree of difficulty involved therein? Further, who is to determine exactly what an audience, consisting of extremely heterogeneous groups, knows or is capable of understanding? Yet, Tudor rejects all psychoanalytic approaches on the basis of various inadequacies in

one psychoanalytic perspective – though he does acknowledge that there are others.

Structural psychoanalysis, for instance, helps us to see the unconscious as a structuring element at work in all cinematic representation – not simply as present at moments of great intensity ('when the unconscious *surges up*' . . . [p. 215, my emphasis]) in the deployment of the horror narrative. It also allows us to speak of 'the desire of the text' as well as 'desire *in* the text' – an important distinction which makes possible a comprehensive reading of the construction of fear in horror texts in relation to filmic codes and mise-en-scene. The notion of 'the desire of the text' points to the workings of the unconscious of ideology. The misogyny of the slasher film, for instance, did not originate in the paranoid genre: its workings can also be seen in texts from the earlier period of the genre (*Phantom of the Rue Morgue* [1954], *White Zombie* [1932], *The Spiral Staircase* [1946]) and in other paranoid texts (film noir, for example) outside the horror genre, texts motivated by a similar desire to offer pleasure in the sight of woman's victimization. By considering the workings of desire, Tudor might have come to different conclusions about the construction of fear, and its transformations, in the two phases of the horror film's development.

Despite its flaws, though, *Monsters and Mad Scientists* is an interesting and provocative book. It is impressive on many levels, particularly in its detailed knowledge of the structure and scope of the genre. It will certainly appeal to those who share Tudor's anti-psychoanalytic approach to the horror film. It is also an ambitious work which suggests how we might approach a study of the relationship between genre and culture in the modern world. That relationship, however, might well turn out to be contradictory, perverse, bizarre – a monster of quite another kind.